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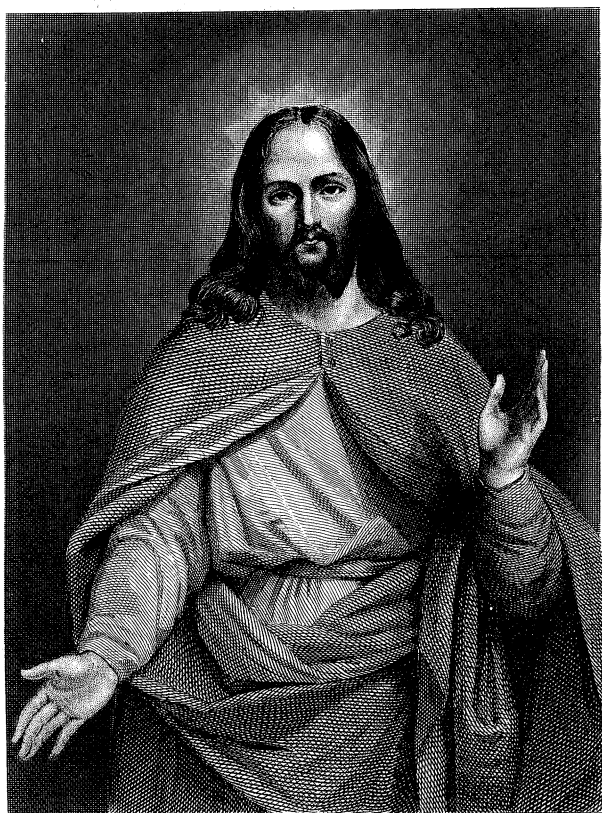
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THE
FOUR GOSPELS;
ARRANGED AS
A PRACTICAL FAMILY COMMENTARY,
FOR
EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE PEEP OF DAY," ETC.

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTORY PREFACE,
BY STEPHEN H. TYNG, D. D.
RECTOR OF ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

AMONG all the varied departments of religious usefulness, no effort can be of greater importance than to make the sacred word of God interesting and attractive to youthful minds. This divine book contains within itself instruction which is of infinite value to the soul. It conveys this heavenly instruction by means and methods exceedingly adapted to awaken and gratify the curiosity and delight of the youthful mind, when they are properly illustrated, and brought out to view. It is susceptible of such explanation and comment, by a wise and affectionate teacher, who has himself been taught by the Holy Spirit in the things of God, as shall clothe its expositions with the deepest and most absorbing interest, and enchain the attention of those to whom they are addressed. The amazing variety of forms in which God has been pleased here to reveal his holy will and purpose, and to proclaim his mercy and his truth to men, furnish a subject for study and meditation, compensating the utmost devotion of time and thought, and able to engage and reward the attention and interest of the most youthful student or hearer. The one great purpose of the Holy Scriptures is, to reveal a Saviour for man, in all the fulness, and power, and glory of his work; and to make men wise unto salvation,

through faith in him. There is probably no single portion of the Bible which is not intended to be particularly connected, in some way, with this great subject, and, in its proper application, to illustrate, explain, or enforce it. To understand this, to find everywhere a Saviour revealed,—or, as Bernard has said, “Christus in omnibus,”—is the desire and effort of every real believer in Jesus, in his study, and in his expositions of the word of God. When this great light is once truly discovered in the Scriptures, it is seen to shine everywhere. The garden of Eden and the flood of Noah,—the journeys of the patriarchs and the sorrows and deliverance of Israel,—the wilderness and the land of promise,—the tabernacle and the temple, with all their rites and festivals, and divine appointments for the worship of the children of Jacob,—each appears intended to give witness to the grace and glory of a Saviour; and shines most attractively, glowing with the excellence and beauty of his merits and grace. The effort to understand this sacred purpose, to ascertain “the mind of the Spirit” in every passage, imparts a very peculiar interest to the private study of the sacred word, and to its familiar expositions to others. The Bible thus becomes, in every passage, important to every reader, and presents in each, some new and peculiar view of gospel truth to the attentive and spiritual mind. Redemption,—glorious and complete redemption for man, in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and dominion of the Son of God, and in all the wonderful results of this amazing undertaking, in the history and experience of man redeemed by his sacrifice and power,—becomes the special theme of instruction in every history and event recorded in the Scriptures, however local and individual they may at first appear. Now, to interest the

minds of the young in this great subject,—to show to them, simply, but clearly and effectually, what God really means to teach in his holy word,—to take off the dull, technical, and barren aspect under which this word habitually appears before them, and to make them feel that it is really attractive, striking, and full of instruction which they will truly love to receive, is an object worthy of the labor and devotion of any human mind; an employment large and important enough to command any exertions, or any study, on the part of those who feel a real desire to be spiritually useful to others.

This is a department of Christian usefulness which was scarcely touched in the Church until the present age, and which even now has been but very partially improved. In our time, some effort has been made to bring the precious truths of the Bible within the reach and comprehension of the young. Much benefit has been thus conferred upon them. Doubtless the eternal salvation of many will be found to have resulted from the various instruments of this most interesting and important class of Christian labor. The excellent author of this present familiar commentary, —a Christian lady, if we are rightly informed,—has accomplished an important measure of this desired work. Her other publications named in the title-page of the present, are most successful efforts to make scriptural truths acceptable and engaging to the young. The present work, published under the rather indefinite title of “Light in the Dwelling,” is an undertaking in the same line, equally valuable, and likely to be equally successful. It is a familiar practical commentary upon the Gospels, in language extremely simple, and in the character and matter of its instruction, most valuable and correct. This is a very fair

specimen of a work which yet remains to be accomplished, and which, if well done, would be an invaluable gift to the Christian church. We mean an interesting and familiar commentary on the Scriptures, suited in language and sentiment to the minds of the young. Who shall have the blessed and exalted privilege of being thus "a teacher of babes," in the great and gracious truths of the word of God? Where is the faithful spiritual guide whom God will raise up, prepare, and instruct, for this important design, of giving a clear, evangelical, and attractive exposition of his sacred word, illustrated in language and style adapted to families, and especially to the youthful members of families, in the church of Christ? We believe no work could be more important, or would be more likely to be useful, popular, and successful, than such a commentary, wisely designed, and intelligently and truthfully executed. The attention and interest of youthful minds can always be easily drawn to the Bible, when expositions of it are within the reach of their comprehension, and adapted to their habits of thought. There would scarcely be found an exception to this remark, whether children were individually or collectively addressed by such expositions. And while the far greater portion of those who are really taught of God in the revelations of his word, are early interested by the Holy Spirit in these great subjects, and become, while they are yet young, spiritually and truly the members of his kingdom, this precious and important class of minds constitute a field of labor, which all ministers and mature Christians ought to feel it a privilege to cultivate with eagerness and perseverance.

The deep interest which the author of the present work felt in this field of effort, to which she has devoted her

powers and pen, may be gathered from the following striking passage from her own preface :

“And what is *success*? No circulation, however extensive,—no approbation, even of the wise and good, could be deemed success, if unattended by the conversion or edification of immortal souls. But if, at the last day, it should be made manifest that, through the means of this humble work, some thoughtless girl, removed from a beloved home, and sojourning among strangers, had been led to cry, ‘My Father, thou art the guide of my youth,’—that some ignorant boy, in times past unprofitable to all, had, like Onesimus, become profitable to his employer and to the church of God,—that some self-righteous person, faithful to her *earthly* master, but a rebel against the best of Masters, had been brought, in her declining years, to seek His righteousness, and devote herself to His service,—that some unhappy wanderer, stained with secret crime, and tormented by the pangs of a guilty conscience, had been encouraged to plead for pardon, and to wash in the Saviour’s precious blood,—that some little child, sitting at the feet of its father, or of its mother, turning over the leaves of its first Bible, had learned to love the Friend of little children,—this, *this* would indeed be success. Will the reader join his prayers to mine that such a boon may be granted me by ‘the FATHER OF LIGHTS, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift?’ ”

Such success as this, we have no doubt, the author will find, in a very abundant measure,—success which will cheer her soul and enlarge her blessedness in a world, where the works of men are made manifest, and the faithful people of God have praise of him. It is in the full conviction that this present work is eminently adapted to produce this

happy result, and to open the precious and imperishable blessings of the Gospel to those who familiarly use it, that we are able to recommend it in a very cordial and unqualified manner. It will be a faithful and attractive guide both in family reading and in the private study of the young. If God shall be pleased to accompany it, and bless it with his own Holy Spirit, it will prove to all who employ it for their instruction, a guide to the knowledge of a Saviour, and a faithful interpreter of his sacred word. It may serve also as a very excellent pattern and guide for the discharge of a similar duty by other Christians, to whom the opportunity may be given. It will encourage them to attempt the plan of similar familiar expositions of the Scriptures in their own families, or in Sunday-schools, or on other occasions, where a way may be opened for a word of exhortation or counsel. And thus the author's labor may be crowned with an enlarging and perpetuating influence, quite beyond the modest and limited expectations she would herself have formed.

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INTRODUCTION.

CAN there be any account in the world so interesting to us as the history of our Lord and Saviour, while he spent thirty-three years upon earth? There were persons with him who heard his sayings and observed his actions. Four holy men, as you are aware, wrote accounts of his life. It might well be supposed that these histories would not contradict each other, for they were all true. But the writers not only wrote what they knew to be true—the Holy Spirit instructed them *what* to relate. They were inspired of God. When we read their writings, we read the words of God himself. With what reverence should we attend! As some of these four Evangelists related one event, and some related another, it is interesting to place their accounts together, endeavoring to observe, as well as we can, the order of time in which the events occurred. Such an arrangement is called a “Harmony.”

We shall begin with the words of John, because he speaks of Jesus *before* he came into the world, even when he was with his Father in heaven. We shall find that the Son of God made the world. He did not appear in it as a man, till four thousand years had rolled away; but long before he came, he was promised by God, and described by the prophets, such as Moses, David, Isaiah, and many others,—of whom Malachi was the last.

At length he appeared, and fulfilled all that had been said of Him.

Let us read of Him, as of one that came into the world to save *us*. Every thing that concerns him is of the greatest importance to us; for if we do not believe on him, and love him above all, we shall perish forever. Let us, therefore, always before we read, lift up our hearts to God in prayer.

“O Lord, grant unto us thy Holy Spirit, that our souls may be saved by the knowledge of thy blessed Son!”

We shall not always meet together to worship God as we do now. A day will come when each of us will unite with the rest in reading and prayer for the *last* time.

But if we believe in Jesus, we shall not part forever. We shall meet again in Heaven. *Then* how delightful it will be to look back upon the time, when as one family, we used to assemble to hear about our beloved Lord. Many hours which we spent below may then be remembered with regret ; but not those precious moments devoted to hearing about Him, whose presence will make us happy through *eternity*.

THE FOUR GOSPELS;

A PRACTICAL FAMILY COMMENTARY.

JAN. 1.*

JOHN I. 1-5.—*The Word.*

Who is the Word spoken of in these verses? He is the Son of God. He is called the Word, because he makes God his Father known to us. How is it *our thoughts* are made known to our fellow-creatures? By our *words*. Thus the unseen Father is made known to men by his Son Jesus Christ. No man can know the *Father*, but by the *Son*. The Son and the Father are distinct persons, for it is written in the first verse, "The Word was *with* God;" that is, the Son was *with* the Father. Yet the Son and the Father are *one God*, for it is added, "The Word was God."

But even if we had not found this sentence, "The Word was God," we should have known that he was God, by the things that are said of him in the following verses.

First, it is declared that he was from the beginning with God.

Now God is the *First*, and if the Son of God is from everlasting, then he is *First*, and he must be God. Again it is declared that *all* things were made by him. Thus we know the Son is the Creator of the world. He cannot then be a creature; for no creature can "create." God alone can create.

Then again it is said, He is the "Life." He gives life. All the angels in heaven cannot give life to the smallest insect, or even to the meanest flower: but the Son can give life to the creatures he has made; not only *natural* life, but *spiritual* and *eternal* life. Lastly, it is declared that he is the Light of men: a brighter light than the sun, a light which shines into the heart and enlightens the dark mind.

And what is *man* called? Observe the name that is given to him. He is called "Darkness." In verse the fifth it is written, "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." Ever since Satan, the prince of darkness, tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, the minds of men have been dark; they have neither

* Though it cannot be supposed that *families*, in reading these sections, will be able to adhere to the days of the month, yet the date is marked for the advantage of young persons who may read the work in private.

known what is right, nor loved what is good. Christ came into the world to bring light to the dark minds of men. But alas! how few receive him! Most people are so much pleased with the trifles of time, or so much taken up with the cares of the world, that they turn away from the Son of God. This blessed book which we hold in our hands tells us about Him. Does not each of us wish to be happy for ever? Then let us listen attentively, and let us entreat God to give us faith that we may believe and be saved.

Scripture portion for the other part of the day.*
Gen. I. *The Creation.*

JOHN I. 6-11.—*The Witness.*

BEFORE the Lord Jesus came into the world, God sent a man called John to be a witness to him. He is called the Baptist, and was *not* the same John who wrote the history we are now reading.

John the Baptist was a faithful preacher, a burning and a shining light, but he was not *that light*; he was not the Son of God.

He was only a man; but he loved the Son of God, and he desired that all men through him, that is, "through his preaching," might believe in Jesus. It is the desire of every faithful minister, that *through him* men should believe in Christ. God does make men the instruments of turning the hearts of their fellow-creatures to God. Many of the children of Israel did John turn to the Lord their God. It is not *ministers* only who turn the hearts of sinners; but other Christians also. There is an account of a poor gipsy woman who, by her conversation, converted no less than twelve persons.† What an honor it would be to us if God should cause any one to believe in Jesus through *us*—through what *we* said or did! May our light so shine before men, that they, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father who is in heaven!

In the ninth verse it is said that Jesus lights every man that comes into the world. This means that Jesus is the *only* light—just as there is only *one* sun in the sky to give us light: so there is only *one* Saviour to save us. But Jesus does not light those who never heard of him. The heathen sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Neither does he light all who have heard of him. He shines around *us*: but if we are *blind*, he does not give *light* even to *us*.

How affecting it is to read that his own *world* did not know him when he appeared, that his *own nation* the Jews, his brethren accord-

* As the portion of Scripture in which remarks are made is often very short, another larger portion has been selected for reading at another part of the day.

† See the history of "The Aged Gipsy:" a tract published by Nisbet.

ing to the flesh, did not receive him! "He came unto his *own*, and his own received him not." As if a mother were to appear among her children, and they should deny that she was their mother. How many people are there now who are not ashamed to say, "I do not pretend to be religious," which means, "I do not pretend to love God," as if they had nothing to do with God, as if he had not made them, and did not feed them, and watch over them continually. What should we think of a child who should say of an affectionate parent, "I do not pretend to care for him?" What would a parent feel, who heard a child speak thus? There is no parent who feels so tender an interest in his children as Christ felt for his people the Jews. Remember the tears he shed over Jerusalem, when he uttered those touching words, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Are there any here who now refuse to receive the loving Saviour into their hearts? Let me entreat you no longer to grieve him by treating him thus. You are the work of his hands. He longs to make you happy. Open your hearts to him, and receive him as your Lord.

Evening Scripture portion. James V. *Conversion of sinners.*

JOHN I. 12, 13.—*The sons of God.*

WE know that when the Lord Jesus came into the world, the greater part of men despised and rejected him; but there were a few who received him. They believed in him; that is, they received Jesus into their *hearts*. And now observe what a glorious privilege God bestowed upon these believers. He gave them "power to become the sons of God." He adopted them as his sons and heirs. It is written in Romans viii. 15, "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father;" and again, "If children, then *heirs*." God will bestow upon his adopted children his riches in glory. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things. I will be his God, and he shall be my son."—Rev. xxi. 7.

But what is the *reason* that *some* believed in Jesus? Were they by nature better than others? Were their hearts softer, so that they *could* not reject their dying Saviour? No: they were by nature like others—but they were born of God. As it is written in the *thirteenth* verse, "Which were born of God;" that is, of the Spirit of God.

We are also told what they were *not* born of. Let us consider each of the expressions:—

"Not of *blood*:" that is, they did not believe because they were of the blood of any good man, such as Abraham. Many who were of the blood of Abraham did not believe in Christ! Neither were they

born of *the will of the flesh*. They did not believe, because it was the will of their flesh, or of their nature to believe. They did not choose Christ from their own power. If they had been left to themselves, they would have refused him; for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. 1 Cor. ii. 14. Neither were they born of *the will of man*. They did not believe because it was the will of any *man* that they should believe. Such persons are not converted as a minister most desires to convert, or as he thinks it most likely will be converted. It is the will of *God* that makes a man believe.

If *we* have been born of God, we see that it was *not* because we were of the blood of any pious parents or ancestors; it was *not* because it was the will of our *flesh* to believe, for we were *dead* in sins. It was *not* because it was the will of *man*. No pious minister or friend could have made us believe. But if we have been raised from the death of sin, it was the power of *God* that raised us. Therefore to God be all the glory.

If we have *not* been born again, then let us go to God, who alone can convert us, and entreat him to put forth his *great* power to make us believe that we may become the children of God and heirs of the kingdom of glory. For it is too true that until we believe in Christ, we are the children of Satan, and not the children of God. Who can bear the thought of being the child of the devil, and an heir of wrath! Yet what does the Apostle Paul say to the Ephesians? He says of himself and of them, "We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."—ii. 3. But we *may* be born again; we *must* be born again. Then we shall belong to the family of God, and be the heirs of heaven.

Evening Scripture portion. Eph. II. *Regeneration.*

JOHN I. 14—18.—*The testimony of John.*

IN the beginning of this chapter we read of a great wonder, that the Word was with God, and yet was God. We cannot understand how this could be. In this passage we read of another wonder, yet we are so much accustomed to hear it, that we almost forget to consider the greatness of the wonder, "The *Word* was made *flesh*." God became man; he "dwelt among us."

When we look around us at this great world, and at the heavens spangled with stars, and think that *He* who made all these things became a weak man, who ate, drank, and slept like ourselves, do we not feel amazed? We may well inquire *why* God became a man, and dwelt among us?

It was to save us from everlasting misery. We are told in verse 14, "He was full of grace and truth." He came to bring grace to

sinners, to pardon their sins by his free grace. He came to suffer all he had said he would suffer. He had said he would suffer our punishment, and he was full of *truth*, and suffered it *all*, showing that God hated sin, and that he would punish it with death.

Now, John the Evangelist, when he speaks of Jesus, breaks out into an exclamation at the remembrance of his *glory*. He says in verse 14, "*We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father.*" John had really seen Jesus. As he says in his First Epistle, i. 1, speaking of Jesus, "that which our eyes have seen, which we have looked upon."

"We beheld his glory." *What* glory does he here refer to? Does he refer to the glory which shone on the mount, when "his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light?"—Matt. xvii. 2. Perhaps it is to this glory he refers, or perhaps it is to the glory of holiness which always shone in Jesus, and which the world could not see; for they saw "no beauty in him, that they should desire him."—Isaiah liii. 2. But those who believed in him saw this glory. Do *we* see it? Has the Spirit opened our inward eyes, so that we see Christ to be worthy of all our love?

There was a man who saw this glory, and pointed Jesus out to others. His name was John the Baptist.

He spoke of him long before he saw him. At last he saw him, and said to the people, "This is he of whom I spake. He that cometh after me is preferred before me; for he was before me." Jesus was six months younger than John the Baptist, therefore John said he came *after* him. Yet he was *before* him, because he was with his Father *before* he came into the world.

Who is speaking in verse 16? Not John the Baptist, but John the writer of this history. He speaks in the highest terms of love and praise of our great Saviour. How happy are they who can say with John, "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." In Jesus there is a full store of grace, sufficient for every believer. And do we not need these graces? Do we not often lament our want of patience, meekness, kindness, and charity? Jesus is willing to bestow them *all* upon us. Moses was a great lawgiver; but he could not bestow grace. Moses appointed many forms and ceremonies, to *represent* the way of salvation, but Jesus brought salvation. Therefore it is written, "Truth came by Jesus Christ."

The Father dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto; but he spared his Son from his bosom that we might behold him. Though we have not seen him ourselves, we have heard enough about him to make us love him. If our hearts were not like stones by nature, we should have loved him from the first moment we heard of him; and yet perhaps there may be some here who had lived twenty or thirty years in the world before they *began* to love him; and there may be others who do not love him *yet*. May the Lord soften their hearts.

Evening Scripture portion. 2 Cor. IV. *The glory of Christ.*

LUKE I. 1—4.—*The Preface to St. Luke.*

THE holy Evangelist Luke writes a short preface before his history of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This preface is a kind of letter to Theophilus, for whose use especially he wrote the history. Let us inquire who Luke was, and who Theophilus was. Luke is not mentioned in any of the Gospels; but Saint Paul speaks of him in his epistle to the Colossians, as, “the beloved physician,” iv. 14. There is reason also to suppose he was not a Jew, but a converted heathen;* yet he had the honor of writing a part of the holy Word of God. Theophilus was probably a governor; therefore he was called “most excellent,” as dukes are now styled “your grace,” and kings “your majesty.” Theophilus, though a nobleman, had been instructed in religion by some of God’s servants; but Luke wished him to know the history of the Lord still more perfectly. He says in the fourth verse, that he had written this account that “thou (Theophilus) mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed.”

It appears that other persons had written histories of Christ. These persons had not been directed by the Holy Spirit, as the Evangelists had; neither had they themselves witnessed the events they had related. They had written from “report,” and their accounts contained errors. It is happy for us that these erroneous accounts have not been handed down to us, but only the inspired histories of the four Evangelists.

Saint Luke himself had not been an eye-witness of the events he records; yet we cannot say he wrote from “report:” for he was directed by the Spirit of God. He had enjoyed great opportunities of knowing about Jesus: he declares in v. 3, that he had had perfect understanding of all things from the “very first,” or from the very earliest part of our Saviour’s life. Still his history would not have been reckoned a part of the holy Bible, if the Holy Spirit had not directed him what to write. This book has always been read in the assemblies of Christians, and called the word of God.

Let us thank God for this part of his word. How many interesting events and parables are related by Luke, which we should never have known had he not written! How we ought to value every thing that concerns the Lord Jesus! When we love a friend, we desire to know every thing about him, and to hear what he did even when he was a child! When we have lost him, we think over his dying words, and lay them up in our hearts! How much more should we delight in knowing all that concerns the best of friends! When we consider

* In Colossians iv. Saint Paul speaks of several persons who were of the circumcision, that is, who were Jews, and then adds, “These *only* are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort to me.” Yet he afterwards mentions Luke. He must have been a comfort to him: therefore it is concluded he was not a Jew

who he was, the Lord of Glory, we can compare no earthly friend to him; all is wonderful that relates to him. It is affecting to hear how the poor heathen, when first converted, value the word of God! Before the missionaries in the South Sea Islands could print the Bible in the language of the people, the poor natives eagerly listened to all that was read aloud on the Sabbath, and many wrote down upon the leaves of trees the texts they had heard, and studied them wherever they went till they knew them by heart. We are without excuse if we remain ignorant of the history of our Lord. Let us not, however, forget for what purpose we read: that we may learn to love Jesus. We are apt to become fond of human creatures whom we know intimately. How much more might it be expected that hearing of Jesus would make us love him; for he is far more excellent than any creature, and far more full of love to us than our dearest friend. Yet our hearts are naturally so much hardened against God, that unless the Holy Spirit soften them, we shall not love him. May that Spirit be with us, while we read day after day the history of our blessed Lord.

Evening Scripture portion.

1 Tim. III. *Inspiration of the Scriptures.*

LUKE I. 5-14.—*The Angel's visit to Zacharias.*

LUKE said in his preface, that he had perfect understanding of all things from the very *first*; so we find that his history begins very early indeed, and describes events that happened before the birth of Jesus.

John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus. In this chapter we have an account of his parents. His father was a priest named Zacharias. His mother Elizabeth also was of the family of the priests, the descendants of Aaron.

Zacharias and Elizabeth "were righteous before God." How could they be righteous? Is it not written, "There is none righteous; no, not one?" God, who knows all hearts, has made this declaration. But when a man believes in Christ, he becomes righteous, for the righteousness of Christ becomes his. Jesus bare *our sins* that we might obtain *his righteousness*. But it may be said, "How could Zacharias and Elizabeth believe in Christ? Did they not live before he came into the world?" They did. But they believed in the *promise* of a Saviour; and thus they became partakers of his righteousness. It was in this way Abraham was righteous. It is written, "He believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness."—Gen. xv. 6. Faith is the means by which sinners receive the righteousness of Christ. It has often been compared to the *hand*; and

righteousness to a *treasure*. As the hand grasps the treasure, so faith lays hold of Christ's righteousness.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were pardoned sinners. Therefore they were sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Though still subject to sin, they indulged in no sinful *habits*. They were not satisfied (as hypocrites are) with observing those commandments that it was convenient to obey, while they neglected those that were more difficult: but they walked in *all* the commandments of the Lord blameless. We shall soon have a proof that they were still subject to sin; for we shall soon read how Zacharias was overtaken by unbelief.

Zacharias and Elizabeth had no child; and the want of children was considered by the Jews as a heavy affliction. Yet at length they became the parents of one of the greatest prophets that ever appeared in the world. All the circumstances connected with this event were very remarkable.

As Zacharias was a priest, it was his office at certain times to burn incense in the temple. The priests were so numerous, that they could not all live at Jerusalem. They were divided into twenty-four courses; and each course came up to Jerusalem in its turn, to serve for one week in the temple. It was determined by lot every morning who was to enjoy the privilege of burning incense that day at the golden altar. The priest, on whom the lot fell, went alone into the temple both morning and evening, to burn sweet spices as an offering to God, while the people remained in the court repeating public prayers for a blessing upon all nations.

On the day when God purposed to speak to Zacharias, he caused the lot to fall upon him. The most minute circumstances are under his control, and are often the beginnings of very great events.

When Zacharias beheld the angel standing by the altar, he was troubled. We always find that men are troubled at the presence of angels. Yet Zacharias had no reason to fear, for the heavenly messenger came not to destroy him, but to bless. He said, "Thy prayer is heard." What prayer? Was it for a son that Zacharias had prayed? Or was it that the Saviour might soon come into the world? Both these blessings were soon to be bestowed. A son was to be born to Zacharias, to prepare the way for the Saviour that was to be given to men. Well might a father rejoice at the birth of such a son! His very name showed that God would bless him and make him a blessing. The word "John" signifies "the grace or favor of God." When a child has been born, it has very seldom been known whether he would become a curse or a blessing. There has often been joy at the birth of children, who have lived to do great harm, and even to break their parents' hearts. When Cain was born, Eve rejoiced; saying, "I have gotten a man from the Lord:" little thinking how wicked a man he would be. Other children have been born undesired; perhaps the family was already numerous and ill-provided for; yet some of those unwelcome little strangers have lived, not only to rejoice their

parents' hearts, but to save souls from eternal death. Did Christians know when a faithful minister was born into the world, how much they would rejoice ! We cannot tell, when we look upon a helpless babe, what it will become ; but we may offer up our earnest prayers that it may be a blessing and not a curse.

Evening Scripture portion. Rom. III. *Righteousness.*

LUKE I. 15-17.—*The Prophecy concerning John the Baptist.*

How happy was Zacharias to hear such a character of his promised son from the lips of an angel ! His son was to be "great in the sight of the Lord." It would not be a blessing to have a son great in the sight of the world. Those who are great in the sight of the Lord are despised by the world. Men said of John the Baptist, "He hath a devil," and they counted the apostles as the offscouring of all things.

The angel said that John was to drink neither wine nor strong drink. He should be filled with the Holy Ghost, and many of the children of Israel should he turn to the Lord their God. Why then was John to drink no wine ? Because he was a Nazarite. A Nazarite was a person separated unto the Lord in a very singular manner. Sometimes the Israelites made vows thus to separate themselves for a week, or a month, or a longer space of time. During that time they tasted neither wine nor grapes ; and they suffered the locks of hair on their heads to grow long. Some children were made Nazarites from their birth. Samuel was thus devoted to the Lord by his praying mother ; and Samson by the appointment of an angel. John the Baptist was also a Nazarite from his birth. Jewish ceremonies have ceased since the Lord Jesus has made known his Gospel. But though we ought not to become Nazarites, we ought, like them, to be devoted to the service of God, and separated from the sinful pleasures of an ungodly world.

The angel also declared that the child soon to be born would go before the Lord in the *spirit* and *power* of Elias. If we read the history of the prophet Elijah, we shall see a great resemblance between him and John the Baptist.

They were like each other in *spirit*. Both were faithful and courageous. Elijah prophesied in the court of the wicked king Ahab, and his more wicked queen ; and by his boldness endangered his life. John reproved King Herod so faithfully for his sins, that he was imprisoned, and at length murdered at the request of the cruel Herodias. In *spirit* therefore John resembled Elijah.

He came also in the *power* of that great prophet ; and, like him, he had great success. At one time Elijah thought there was not a single pious prophet in all Israel ; and he complained to God, saying, "I,

even I, only am left :” but such *power* accompanied his instructions, that before he was taken up to heaven, there were numerous young men, called sons of the prophets, all over the land, training up for the ministry. John the Baptist also had great success ; and some of his disciples were numbered among the apostles of the Lamb.

But the most delightful part of the angel’s message to Zacharias was the promise that the Saviour should soon come. He spoke of the Saviour as the Lord God of Israel ; for he said, “And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the *Lord their God* ; and he shall go before *him* in the spirit and power of Elias.”

The Son of God was coming into the world to shed his blood to save sinners ; yet it was necessary that one should go before him to *turn* the hearts of men towards him. What a proof this is of the wickedness of the human heart ! It is turned against God. Satan, in the garden of Eden, turned the heart of Eve against her best friend. Now every one is an enemy of God, until he is converted. God sends his faithful preachers to turn our hearts towards himself. Have not some tried to persuade us to turn to the Lord ? Have they succeeded in persuading us ? It is an awful thing to hear sermons, and to disregard what we hear. Time is passing swiftly away—Jesus will come again in power and great glory. If, when he comes, he finds us unprepared, we shall be shut out of his presence forever.

Evening Scripture portion. Numbers VI. 1–12. *The Nazarite.*

LUKE I. 18–23.—*The Unbelief of Zacharias.*

ZACHARIAS was so much astonished at the message of the angel, that he wanted to see some sign or miracle to prove that the angel came from God. Why was it wrong in Zacharias to desire a sign ? Because he had already had one. The glorious appearance of the angel, which had filled him with fear, was a sufficient sign. God does not wish us to believe things without *any* proof. If he were to send a prophet to speak to us, he would give us some sign to show us that the prophet really came from him. When Moses spoke to the Israelites in Egypt, he gave them two signs ; his rod was turned into a serpent, and his hand was made white with the leprosy, (Exod. iv.) God is angry when men will not believe, when he has given them a sign. It was sinful in Zacharias not to believe after he had seen the glorious angel. Thus we find that though he was righteous before God, he was still subject to sin.

Unbelief is a great sin ; for it is an insult to the truth of God. The angel rebuked the unbelieving priest, saying, “Thou shalt be dumb.” This gentle chastisement would at once remove the doubts of Zacha

rias and remind him of his sin. In this way, God deals with his own people, when they forget what a great God He is.

Zacharias at length came out of the temple. It was now expected that he should bless the people in those beautiful words recorded in Numbers vi. 24—27, beginning, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee;" but he could not speak, and he made signs to show the people what he had seen in the temple.

Each division of priests remained to serve in the temple from one Sabbath to the next; in a few days, therefore, at the furthest, Zacharias returned to his own house among the hills. What a history he had to unfold to Elizabeth! For he was able to inform her in writing. What a proof she beheld of the power of God in the dumbness of her husband! We should take notice of God's dealings with others. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."—Psalm cvii. 43.

How humbly and gratefully Elizabeth behaved on this occasion! She acknowledged the goodness of the Lord in having condescended to look upon her affliction; for she had been exposed to much reproach on account of having no child. When troubles are removed, we are apt to overlook the Lord's merciful hand! Perhaps we have been suffering under some trial; the unkindness of a relation, the dread of sickness, or the pressure of poverty: God removes the trial, and we forget how much it weighed us down before, and so we omit to thank the Lord heartily.

A holy minister named Rutherford, in one of his letters, written two hundred years ago, says, that one of the things which most showed him his own wickedness by nature, was his feeling more disposed to call upon the Lord in trouble, than to thank him when delivered. Let us think over the things that troubled us a few years ago, and bless the hand which has lightened our load.

Evening Scripture portion. Ex. IV. 1—17. *Two Signs wrought by Moses.*

LUKE I. 26—33.—*The Angel's visit to Mary.*

GOD appointed that his Son should be born six months after John. So six months after the angel had spoken to Zacharias, he came to Mary. She was a poor woman, of a low, mean city, called Nazareth. She was indeed descended from King David, who had lived more than a thousand years before, and she was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph, also descended from King David. It had been prophesied that the Son of God should be born among David's family. Isaiah calls the Saviour "A rod out of the stem of Jesse," (Isaiah xi. 1,) for Jesse was the father of David. Jesse was like a tree, of which Jesus was a rod or branch.

It seems probable that the angel visited Mary when she was alone. He said, "Hail," bidding her rejoice because a wonderful favor was about to be conferred on her.

The Roman Catholics pretend that the words "highly favored" mean "full of grace;" and say, that Mary can now impart grace, and that the angel worshipped her. But we know that Mary was but a creature, and even a sinful creature, and that it is idolatry to treat her as the Lord.

Mary was full of humility; and God loves to honor the humble. She was alarmed at the salutation or speech of the angel; but she was soon desired not to fear, and was informed of the wonderful event about to happen.

The Saviour so long expected was to be her son. He was to be called "Jesus," which signifies Saviour, and is the same name as Joshua.* The angel said this Saviour should be a great king. Perhaps you will inquire, Was he not equal with God? was he not King of Kings from everlasting? Yes: but the angel spoke of his greatness in his human nature. As a *man*, he was to be king; therefore it was said that "the Lord would give unto him the throne of his *father* David." He was to be King over the house of Jacob, that is, over the Jews, the descendants of Jacob. The words that were afterwards written over the cross were true, "The King of the *Jews*." But is he not King of the Gentiles also? Yes; he is: and the day shall come when *every* tongue will confess that he is Lord; and when *every* knee will bow to him. (Phil. ii.)

Of his kingdom there shall be no *end*. Other kingdoms have come to an *end*. Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream an image which represented all the kingdoms of the world: and he saw a little stone overthrow this image, and this stone become a mountain. (Dan. ii.) The stone represented Christ. He will bring all kingdoms to an end; and then he will be King over all the earth. (Zec. xiv. 9.) Then there will be no more war, nor famine, nor misery; men will obey Christ's laws, and live in holiness and peace.

That day is not come yet. Very few persons have submitted to Christ; very few seek to do his will. Christ is a king against whom his subjects have rebelled. But do you not think that a king loves his faithful subjects at such a time? How dear to him is their obedience, when others scorn him! Does our King and Saviour count *us* among his faithful subjects? Then he will acknowledge us when he comes in glory. This song shall soon be sung in heaven by the saints: "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power and hast reigned." (Rev. xi.) Then He will give reward to them that fear his name, small and great.

Evening Scripture portion. Is. XI. *Christ the rod out of Jesse's stem.*

* Joshua is called Jesus in Hebrews iv. 8.

LUKE I. 34-45.—*Mary's visit to Elizabeth.*

THE angel had told Mary of the great power and glory of the Son she should have. He next told her of the *holiness* of his nature. His body was to be miraculously formed by the power of the Holy Ghost; though born of a human mother. Jesus had flesh and blood like ourselves, (Hebrews ii. 14;) and he was subject to all our bodily weaknesses; he needed food and sleep; he suffered pain; he shed tears and sweat drops of blood; but he was without *sin*; (Heb. iv. 15:) he was "holy, harmless, undefiled." (Heb. vii. 26.) Such was the child of whom Mary was to be the mother! Were such wonderful tidings ever delivered to any human creature, as were then spoken to Mary? Yet she believed. Her faith was greater than that of Zacharias; and she received no rebuke from the angel.

What a prospect lay before her! Many would disbelieve her story, and treat her with contempt. Yet Mary was willing to bear the trial. She said, "Be it unto me according to thy word." God often makes those suffer most deeply whom he designs to honor most highly. When God intends that persons should do much good to souls, (and this is one of the highest honors,) he often permits suspicion to be cast upon their characters; but at length he clears their innocence.

Mary had heard from the angel of the mercy shown to Elizabeth; and she went immediately to see her.

How interesting it is to hear what happened when these two holy women met! There was a great difference between their ages. Elizabeth was very old: Mary was not old: it is probable she was very young. Yet she was far more highly honored than her aged relative. The old are often envious of the young; but the pious Elizabeth was ready to do honor to Mary. When she saw her, she spoke by the power of the Holy Ghost, and acknowledged her as the mother of the Lord.

It must have comforted Mary to find that Elizabeth also believed in the things that were coming to pass. How it must have rejoiced her, to hear her say, "Blessed is she that believed."

These words do not apply to Mary alone; but to *every one* that believes. What ought *we* to believe? All the promises of God.

He has promised to cast out none that come to him, but to give them everlasting life. If we believe this promise, we shall come to him. If we *have* come to him, how *many* precious promises belong to us! God has promised to hear our prayers, to make all things work together for our good, to deliver us out of every temptation, and to give us, even in this life, peace which passeth all understanding. Those who trust in these promises find there is a performance of the things that were told them.

It was a good answer that was once given by a poor woman to a

minister who asked her, "What is faith?" She replied, "I am ignorant: I cannot answer well: but I think faith is taking God at his word."

Evening Scripture portion. Heb. II. *Christ's human nature.*

LUKE I. 46-56.—*The Song of Mary.*

THIS beautiful song shows us what was Mary's state of mind at this time. We must remember that there was much to try her in her present circumstances, for many people would not believe her account of the angel's visit, and would treat her with scorn. Yet she was filled with joy, because she enjoyed the favor of the Lord. She said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." How great was Mary's faith! Faith enables us to rejoice in the midst of trials. Saint Paul had this faith when he said, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed."

Mary knew that whatever men thought of her *then*, that all generations would "call her blessed," as the mother of the Saviour. Do we not think her blessed? Surely we do. Let us not forget that *we* may be blessed also; for Jesus said that "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matt. xii. 50.) And at another time, when a woman said how blessed his mother was, Jesus answered, "Rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." (Luke xi. 28.)

It is sad to think what a wrong use the Roman Catholics have made of the words of Mary. They not only call her "blessed," (and she *is* blessed,) but they worship her, as if she were equal to him, "who is over all, God blessed for ever." (Rom. ix. 5.) No: Mary was but a creature like ourselves; though she was made, by the grace of God, a holy creature, and was honored in so remarkable a manner.

We see in her song how great a value she set upon the blessings of redemption. She would not have done so, if she had not felt her need of a Saviour. How she delights in praising God! She calls him *mighty*—"He that is mighty." She calls him *holy*—"Holy is his name." She speaks of his *mercy*—"His mercy is on them that fear him."

What does she mean in verse 51, when she says, "He hath shown strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts?" Pharaoh and his proud captains once desired to destroy Israel: this was "the imagination of their hearts," but God drowned them in the Red Sea. Thus God at last will destroy *all* the enemies of Christ and his people.

From this song we may learn to *what* people the Lord is merciful;

“He fills the *hungry* with good things.” He fed the poor Israelites, when they were hungry, with manna. But it is another sort of hunger which Jesus delights to satisfy. “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Such hungry souls shall never be sent empty away. If a beggar is sent empty away from *one* house, he can go to another; but if God were to send us empty away, and refuse to give us everlasting life, there is no other being to whom we could go. *Will* he send us empty away? No: he will *not*, if we feel our need of pardon; but if we fancy ourselves *rich* in goodness, He will give us none of His goodness or righteousness. Those only who know they are poor blind miserable sinners, will obtain any thing from the Saviour. Let us go *now* to his throne of grace to ask for mercy, and to obtain help in this our time of need; let us go with lowly hearts, feeling our unworthiness and confessing our sins, and He will not send us “empty away.”

Evening Scripture portion. Ex. XIV. *The Red Sea.*

LUKE I. 5-7.—*The Circumcision of John.*

WHEN Elizabeth's son was born, her relations and friends came to rejoice with her. Worldly people, when they are prosperous, are often envied by their friends: but pious people, when they have received any great mercy, generally have friends who *really* rejoice with them.

How richly were Elizabeth's friends rewarded for their sympathy! During their visit they witnessed a wonderful proof of God's power.

It appears that Elizabeth knew what the angel had told Zacharias; for she said that the child was to be called “John,” or “the grace of God.” The friends, by signs, asked the father what the child should be called. We see by their making signs to him that he was deaf as well as dumb. He asked for a writing table, or tablet. These tablets were often spread with wax, and written upon with a piece of steel. Zacharias wrote, “His name *is* John:” not “he *shall* be called John;” but his name *is* John, for the angel had already given the child that name. As soon as he had written these words, his tongue was loosed; and he made *that* use of it for which it had first been given him: he praised God.

The angel had sentenced him to be dumb until the day that the things he had told him of, should be performed, (verse 20.) That day was now come.

We perceive in this event how God can bring good out of evil: Zacharias by unbelief had become dumb; but his gaining his speech again, must have helped others to believe.

His friends related the things they had seen; so that people all around wondered what sort of a man John would become. Thus ma-

ny were prepared to pay attention to his preaching when he grew up. We shall hear little of the childhood of John; but we know that he was holy from his birth. How acceptable to God is the offering up of our early years! as the poet says—

“A flower, when offered in the bud,
Is no mean sacrifice.”

How bitter is the remembrance of a childhood and youth of wickedness! Saint Paul could never remember without grief that he had once persecuted God's people.

Let not those who are young imagine that if they are at *length* converted, it will be of no consequence having long resisted the gracious offers of God. It is delightful to be able to sing with David, “Thou art my trust from my youth.” Those who have not turned to God till their youth was past, often think within themselves, “O that I could pass my time over again! Had I loved God sooner, what sins I should have avoided! what sorrows I should have escaped! how much good I might have done! how much glory I might have brought to God!”

Is it not very ungenerous, because we know that God is willing to receive the returning prodigal, to go far from him, not intending to return till all worldly pleasures are exhausted? Yet many who would be ashamed to treat an earthly friend in this manner, act thus towards their best, their heavenly Friend.

Evening Scripture portion. Eccles. XII. *Early piety*

LUKE I. 67 to end.—*The Prophecy of Zacharias.*

WHAT great mercy God showed to Zacharias! Not only He restored his speech, but He enabled him to prophesy. Zacharias in his song does not speak so much about his own son, as about the Saviour whom his son was to serve. This shows that his heart was fixed upon spiritual blessings, and not upon his own earthly comfort, or honor.

In the beginning of his song, he speaks of the Saviour under the name of “A horn of salvation,” (verse 69.) Why does he give him that name? With its horn an animal destroys its enemies. Christ came to destroy the devil and his works. Why then is He not called a horn of destruction? Because he *destroys* his enemies in order that he may *save* his people: therefore he is called “a horn of salvation.”

In the latter part of his song, Zacharias calls the Saviour by another name, “The dayspring,” (verse 78.) The world sat in darkness and the shadow of death till Christ appeared. They were like travellers, who had lost their way among dangerous cliffs and precipices, and

were suddenly overtaken by the darkness ; so that they durst not stir, lest they should fall into some deep pit. All at once the sun arose "to guide their feet into the way of peace."

Our native land once sat in this darkness, and was filled with idols, till missionaries came and preached the gospel. But even now that Christ's name is known in every town and village, each soul sits in darkness till the "Dayspring from on high" shines into the heart.

In the midst of his song, Zacharias addresses his own infant son, saying, "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the highest." At the time he uttered these words, John was a helpless infant ; but his father knew how great he would become. Very little is related of his childhood. In the last verse of this chapter it is declared that he grew like other children ; and also that he waxed *strong in spirit*. We know what it is to wax strong in *body*. But what is it to wax strong in *spirit* ? It is to have faith in God's word, and to resist in God's strength the temptations of Satan. The apostle John in his first Epistle says, "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one," (ii. 14.) Believers who are strong in spirit are called "young men." How then did John become thus strong in spirit ? No doubt it was by secret prayer and meditation in the deserts. It is written that "He was in the deserts until the days of his showing unto Israel ;" or till the time when he began to preach publicly, which he did either at twenty-seven or thirty years of age. Those who teach others must be prepared by learning first of God.

And what did John the Baptist teach ? His father declares in his song what he taught, (76, 77 :) "Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways ; to give knowledge of salvation unto the people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God."

It was salvation through Christ that John proclaimed. None of the old prophets showed the way as clearly as the holy Baptist. But we have heard it still more clearly described by Jesus and his apostles. Have we rejoiced in hearing that sins are pardoned through the blood of the Lamb ? None ever rejoiced in hearing these tidings, except those who knew that they *needed* pardon.

If a man were to enter this room with a pardon from the governor in his hand, *we* should feel neither joy nor gratitude. We should say, "There must be some mistake ; we have never been brought to justice, nor convicted, nor sentenced to death. What is the use of this pardon to us ?" The reason that most people hear the Gospel with such indifference is, that they do not know that they are condemned by God's law. They say, "Our sins can easily be forgiven ; they are neither many nor great ; others have sinned more than we ; surely we shall escape punishment." But when a sinner feels that he deserved to die, then he thanks God for his *tender mercy*, in having sent the Saviour into the world.

Evening Scripture portion. 1 John II. *Strong in spirit.*

MATT. I.—*The Angel's visit to Joseph.*

MATTHEW wrote his gospel before any of the other evangelists. He wrote it for the Jews especially; and therefore he very often refers to the Old Testament, (held in such reverence by the Jews,) and shows that Jesus fulfilled what the prophets had said. Luke and Mark, who wrote for the Gentiles especially, often *explain* Jewish customs, but Matthew always alludes to them, as customs well understood. Matthew himself had been a publican, or tax-gatherer, before he was called to be one of the apostles of the Lord. His other name was Levi. Luke speaks of him by that name. Luke v. 27.

St. Matthew begins his history with an account of the forefathers of our Saviour: to show that Jesus was descended from Abraham, and from David, as God had promised the Messiah should be. This account is called a genealogy. It is *Joseph's* descent, and *not* Mary's, which is here recorded. St. Luke in his third chapter gives us another genealogy. That genealogy is a little different from this; it must therefore be the genealogy of Mary. It is true the name of *Joseph* is mentioned there also; but the names of women were never inserted in public registers.

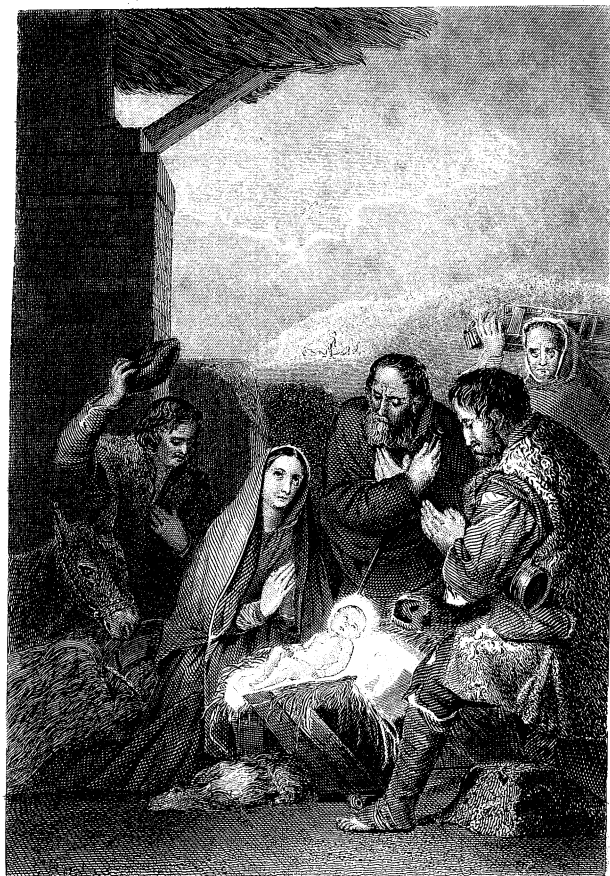
There is one seeming contradiction between the two genealogies. St. Matthew says that *Jacob* was the father of Joseph. St. Luke says that *Heli* was the father of Joseph. We must conclude that Heli was the father-in-law of Joseph, and the father of Mary. How easily the difference is explained to a candid mind! And yet it has been taken up by unbelievers and brought forward as an objection against the Christian religion. How much at a loss must those be for an objection, who lay hold of such a one as this!

We will now proceed to the interesting history itself:—

Joseph is not blamed for his suspicions of Mary, for it appears he had no proof that a miracle had been wrought. Still the kindness of his heart made him unwilling to expose her publicly. God in his great mercy sent an angel to tell him the whole truth. Thus our gracious Father will keep us from falling into errors through ignorance, if we desire earnestly to know what is right.

Mary probably suffered much grief from Joseph's suspicions: but God cleared up her innocence. Every person who is falsely suspected may trust in His fulfilling His promise in Psalm xxxvii.; "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass: and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." When falsely accused, we should not make a loud and angry defence; but commit our cause to God, and He will defend us.

The concluding words of the angel are very remarkable. They are written in verse 21, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."



The name "Jesus" means God the Saviour. Observe, however, the nature of this salvation. It is not a salvation *in* sin, but a salvation *from* sin. "He shall save his people from their sins." If we knew what sin was, we should feel what a great salvation this is. Sin has ruined this world; and it will ruin each of us eternally, unless we are saved from it. There is only one who is able to save us. That is Immanuel, or God with us. Jesus, the Son of God, came down to dwell with us that he might save us from dwelling forever with Satan. How does he save? By shedding his own blood as an atonement for sin, and then by washing all who believe in him in that blood. Therefore his people sing this song of praise to his name: "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Rev. i. 5-8.

Evening Scripture portion. Isa. VII. 10 to end.

LUKE II. 1-7.—*The birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

It is very interesting to observe the providence of God with regard to the *place* of Christ's birth.

The prophet Isaiah had said that the Saviour should be born in Bethlehem, (v. 2.) Yet Mary lived in Nazareth, about seventy miles distant from Bethlehem. God could easily have commanded Mary to go to Bethlehem: but instead of doing this, he caused circumstances to happen which induced her to go there.

The great emperor of Rome, who possessed all the chief countries in the world, and among the rest, Canaan, the land of the Jews, desired at this time to number his subjects. He sent forth an order to have their names *enrolled*, (as you will find the word is also translated in Bibles with marginal readings.) Joseph being descended from King David, went to the city of Bethlehem, (whence David came,) to have his name enrolled, and Mary his wife accompanied him.

Cæsar Augustus, the Emperor of Rome, little knew that by this decree he was causing a prophecy concerning the Son of God to be fulfilled; for he knew nothing of the true God, or of his word. But we, who read the history, ought to admire the ways of God: how easily he can bring every thing to pass which he has determined to do; for he is "great in counsel" (or in making plans) "and mighty in work," Jer. xxxii. 19, (or in bringing his plans to pass.) It is therefore very unbelieving in us to trouble ourselves about the future, for there is nothing we can desire that God could not easily cause to happen; and if he does not bring it to pass, it is because the thing we desire does not agree with his own wise and gracious designs.

When Mary arrived at Bethlehem, she was obliged to lodge in a stable; for the inn was full, many people having come to have their names enrolled also. Thus it happened, that her holy babe was born in a stable, and laid in a manger.

Are we surprised that the glorious Son of God should thus be received into this world! Let us remember *why* he came. Not to *enjoy* himself, but to *save* us. In order to save us, two things were necessary. That he should obey the law of God, which we had broken, and that he should suffer the punishment due to us for breaking it.

In order that he might do these things, he was always placed in suffering circumstances. Poverty and contempt nursed him in his infancy. The most splendid palace on earth would have been too humble an abode for him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain. But instead of opening his infant eyes in a palace, he opened them in a stable. It was wonderful condescension in him who was equal with God, to dwell with *men*, but in the stable he was surrounded by *beasts*. What must the angels who had worshipped him in heaven have felt when they saw him thus degraded! Yet this treatment was not to be compared to that which he afterwards endured on Calvary. As he walked through this world at each step his way became rougher; his *first* bed was a *manger*, but his *last* was a *cross*. And it was *men*, whom he came to redeem, who treated him in this manner. And have we not *all* treated him in the same, casting him out of our thoughts, and crucifying him by our sins? Yes, we are all guilty before God, and Jesus alone is righteous. But he is not righteous for himself, but for *us*; neither did he suffer for himself, but for *us*. He was *cast out*, that we might be *brought in*. He was *rejected* of *men*, that we might be *accepted* of God.

Evening Scripture portion. Micah V. *Bethlehem*.

LUKE II. 8-14.—*The Angels' appearance to the Shepherds.*

IN the circumstances of our Saviour's birth, there was a great mixture of meanness and glory. Jesus was laid in a manger; yet angels announced his appearance. But to *whom* did angels announce it? not to princes, but to shepherds; thus showing that God had chosen the poor of this world. Through all our Saviour's life, there was the same mixture of meanness and glory: he lived with fishermen, yet was sometimes visited by angels; he had a sorrowful countenance, yet once it shone brighter than the sun; he was meanly clad, yet, on one occasion, his raiment was whiter than any fuller on earth could whiten it; he was so *weak* that he could not bear his cross, yet so *strong* that he could raise the dead from their graves.

Christ's people are like their master ; they are often poor and afflicted, yet there is a glory about them that makes them as the sons of God ; for their minds are filled with nobler thoughts than those which occupy the kings of the earth. While princes are thinking of their sumptuous feasts, their high titles, and glittering crowns ; the children of God are meditating upon the supper of the Lamb, the thrones of light, and the God of glory.

How much astonished the poor shepherds were with the appearance of the angel, who turned the darkness into day ! How much his *message* must also have surprised them ! He told them that the Son of God was now come into the world, and was in the city of David, (or Bethlehem.) Was not this news hard to believe ? But what the angel added made it harder still ; for he said that this glorious babe was lying in a manger. Immediately, however, God confirmed his words by causing a multitude of angels to appear in the heavens ; not *two* or *three* witnesses, but, perhaps, two or three millions.

These angels were not *silent* witnesses ; they sang a song, whose very words are handed down to us. It is the only song sung by angels upon *earth* that we ever heard. In the book of Revelation some of their songs in *heaven* are recorded ; such as "Worthy is the Lamb to receive honor, power, and glory ;" and "Thou hast created all things, for thy pleasure they are and were created." But here we read of a song to which poor shepherds listened. It is a short song, but contains much ; for it explains the *purpose* for which the Saviour was come into the world, and the *reason* he was sent.

The purpose was to bring glory to God and peace on earth. The reason he was sent was because God had good-will towards men. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men."

Has not Christ's coming brought glory to God ? Since Christ came into the world, how many redeemed sinners have glorified God for the gift of his Son ! But what are these praises compared to the songs of saints and angels throughout eternity ! Never will they cease to praise the God of love for sending his only Son to die for wretched men. But we may ask, "Is there peace on earth ?" Not *yet* ; but there *will* be. This earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, and then war shall cease ; the swords shall be turned into ploughshares, and the spears into pruning-hooks, (see Isaiah ii. ;) because the Prince of Peace shall reign.

And are these God's gracious promises to men ? Let us not doubt the Lord's *good-will* towards us. It hurts a tender parent, if he perceives that his children doubt his *good-will* towards them : he tries to convince them of it by numerous acts of kindness ; and he is much disappointed if he cannot succeed in winning their confidence. Has not the Lord done enough to convince us of his good-will ? Ought we not always to say, "If God spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not *with him* freely give us all things."—Rom. viii. 32

Evening Scripture portion. Rev. V. *Angels' songs in heaven.*

LUKE II. 15-20.—*The Shepherds' Visit to Bethlehem.*

WE find that the shepherds believed the news they had heard. They did *not* say, "Let us go and see *whether* this thing is come to pass;" but they said, "Let us now go and see this thing which *is* come to pass." They believed *before* they had seen. "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." They spoke also as if they felt grateful for having heard the tidings; for they added, "which the Lord hath made known to us." Truly they had reason to be grateful: for God had shown them very great favor. Let us not forget that we also are among those to whom the Lord has made known the birth of his Son. There are millions on this earth who have never heard of the love of God, in sending a Saviour; but we have heard of it from our infant days. Do we, like these shepherds, long to see our blessed Redeemer?

How much Joseph and Mary must have been delighted at the entrance of the shepherds! Though overlooked by the world, the holy child was honored by these poor men. Even now there are only a few who acknowledge him as their Lord and Master, and these few are generally poor, like the shepherds of Bethlehem.

These good men did not keep the things they had heard and seen, a *secret*. The angel had said that he brought glad tidings which should be to *all* people; therefore the shepherds *told* the news to *all*. Like them, if we believe in Christ ourselves, we shall speak of him to those who know him not.

How did the people *receive* the tidings the shepherds brought? They *wondered*; but probably they soon forgot what they had heard: while Mary "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." This is the way in which sermons should be heard, and in which the Bible should be read. All who get good from what they hear, keep it, and ponder it in their hearts. But how many cast from their minds what they hear!

There are *two* comparisons used in the Scriptures to show the careless way in which people hear the word of God. One of these comparisons is contained in Ezekiel xxxiii. 31, 32. The Israelites listened to the preaching of Ezekiel as people listen to one who can play well on an instrument, and who can sing a lovely song. It is not necessary to think of the music we have heard; it is enough if it pleases us while we are hearing it: but we should not listen to sermons in this manner, and think it enough, if they amuse us.

The other comparison may be found in the first chapter of St. James's Epistle. It is there said that some listen to God's word as a person looks in a glass, and then goes away and forgets what he has seen. Such listeners soon lose the good impressions they have received, and continue worldly-minded, and ungodly.

There is a beautiful description in the first Psalm, of the right man-

ner of receiving the word. The godly man is represented as meditating in God's law, day and night.

One verse of God's holy word laid up in the heart will do us more good than a whole chapter hastily read, and little considered. Are there any passages of the Scriptures which are dear to our hearts? Has any verse strengthened us in the hour of temptation; or comforted us in the day of trouble? Have we laid up any in store against the day when we shall walk through the valley of the shadow of death, when flesh and heart will fail, and when no mortal arm can sustain our sinking souls?

Evening Scripture portion. Ez. XXXIII. 21 to end.
Ezekiel's words listened to as a lovely song.

LUKE II. 21-32.—*The Song of Simeon.*

WE read that when the Saviour was eight days old, he was circumcised, and named Jesus. It was not necessary that he should be brought to Jerusalem for that purpose; but at the end of forty days, when he was nearly six weeks old, he was brought to Jerusalem, for two purposes.

His mother was then first permitted, after the birth of her son, to enter the temple. She went there with an offering of thanksgiving. If she could have afforded it, she would have brought a lamb of a year old; but being very poor, she presented two doves, or pigeons. (See Lev. xii.) In the second place, Jesus as a firstborn son was presented to the Lord; for, ever since the slaying of the firstborn of the people of Egypt, and the passing over the firstborn of Israel, God had claimed all the firstborn as his own. (Ex. xiii.) The firstborn of cows, sheep, and goats were offered in sacrifice: the firstborn of other beasts were not offered, but money was presented in their place, and this money was used in buying sacrifices. Neither did God suffer firstborn *children* to be offered in sacrifice; but he permitted them to be redeemed with money.

Mary accordingly came to the temple to present her firstborn son to the Lord. When was so acceptable an offering made to the Father! His only beloved Son was brought to his Father's house, and given into his Father's bosom. The priest supposed that he was redeemed by money; but this holy child could not be redeemed by money; he was a Lamb without blemish, and upon the altar of the cross he was soon to be laid, a willing, a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

When Mary brought her child into the temple, a most interesting

event took place. An aged prophet appeared, and owned the infant Saviour as his Lord.

Prophets had almost ceased to prophesy for many years before Jesus came into the world. Malachi, who had prophesied four hundred years before his coming, was the last whose name is recorded. But at the time of his coming, the spirit of prophecy was again shed upon some holy persons. We have read the prophecies of Elizabeth, and Mary, and Zacharias, in the first chapter of St. Luke, and we now read the prophecy of Simeon. God had informed him that he should not die till Christ came; and He had also let him know the precise moment when the parents had brought the divine infant into the temple. Simeon entered and found Joseph and Mary doing for their child after the custom of the law, that is, presenting him to the Lord before God's priest. At this interesting juncture, the aged saint first beheld his Saviour, took him in his arms and blessed him; for his faith was so strong that he was able to believe that the infant of the poor woman he saw, was the Lord of all.

The words that he uttered as he held the child are very beautiful. We perceive that it had been his earnest desire to see his Lord with his bodily eyes before he died. This was a very natural desire; and some people who do not really love Christ might desire the same; they might desire it from *curiosity*, but Simeon desired it from *affection*. And why did Simeon love the Saviour? Because he valued his great salvation; he was waiting for the "consolation of Israel," (the name given to Christ in verse 25.) He was a penitent sinner, and it was a consolation to him to know that God had provided a Saviour. He calls Jesus "his salvation," in verse 30. "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He rejoiced also to think that *other* men would be saved through Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles; for he said, (verses 31, 32,) that God had given him to *all* people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of Israel.

This shows the love to *other* men that dwelt in Simeon's heart. He longed that *all* should know his Saviour. It is recorded of a celebrated minister, named John Howe, that in his latter days he greatly desired to attain such a knowledge of Christ, and feel such a sense of his love, as might be a foretaste of the joys of heaven. After his death, a paper was found in his Bible recording how God had answered his prayer. One morning, (and he noted the day,) he awoke, his eyes swimming with tears, overwhelmed with a sense of God's goodness in shedding down his grace into the hearts of men. He never could forget the joy of these moments: they made him long still more ardently for that heaven, which, from his youth, he had panted to behold. How happy thus to see Jesus by *faith* before we die! *then* we too shall behold him some day with our bodily eyes; for though we die without that sight, we shall be raised again to gaze upon our glorious Redeemer, coming in the clouds of heaven.

All true believers may now say, with Job—"I know that my Re-

deemer liveth ; and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth ; and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God ; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another." Job xix. 25-27.

Evening Scripture portion. Job XIX. *Seeing the Redeemer.*

LUKE II. 33-35.—*The words of Simeon to Mary.*

BOTH Joseph and Mary marvelled at the things spoken of Christ by Simeon. The things that made them marvel were that he should be "a light to lighten the Gentiles," as well as the glory of Israel ; for God's goodness to the Gentiles was a mystery long hidden from the Jewish nation. But we happy Gentiles have experienced it, and some among us have found Christ to be a light to lighten our darkness.

Simeon blessed Joseph and Mary : and then he addressed Mary in particular, and prepared her for all the shame and sorrow that her Son should undergo ; for what he had said before might have led her to think that joy only was to be his portion, and that all men, Jews and Gentiles, would immediately do him honor. But this was not to be the case. So great would be the agonies of the Son, that a sword would pierce through the mother's heart. And was not the soul of Mary thus pierced, when she beheld her Son expiring on the cross ?

Simeon's words concerning the child demand attentive consideration,—“This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel.” Let us inquire into their meaning, for all that concerns our Saviour is very important to us. How was he the *fall* of many in Israel ? Does Christ make men fall ? Simeon here compares Christ to a stone over which many stumble and fall. St. Paul says, in 1 Cor. i. 23, that Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, or something over which *they fell*. *How* was it they fell over him ? Through pride. They would not believe that their own righteousness was worthless in God's sight, and that Christ's righteousness alone could be accepted. This is the account St. Paul gives of Christ's rejection by the Jews. His words are, “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their *own* righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God : for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Rom. x. 3, 4. And what is the reason that any still refuse Christ ? Is it not because they do not feel their need of his righteousness ? Is it not because they feel satisfied with their own performances, and imagine that God is satisfied also ? And when they are told that they are sinners, they answer in their *hearts*, if not with their *lips*, “We are not such great sinners as others.” People in this state of mind fall over Christ as

over a stumbling-stone : they cannot receive him, because they do not desire his salvation. St. Peter, in his Epistle, says that Christ was to such persons, "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient." 1 Peter ii. 8.

But Simeon said also that the child was set for the *rising again* of many in Israel. Many of those who fell over him *at first*, afterwards believed, and rose from sin and death by Christ. Many of the priests who joined in crucifying the Saviour were *afterwards* obedient to the faith. Acts vi. 7.

The poor penitent sinner rises by Christ ; that is, he finds in him a rock on which to set his feet ; he finds in Christ one who can forgive his sins, and save his soul ; then he can say with David, "He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." Ps. xl. 2.

Simeon next declared that Christ should be set for "a sign which shall be spoken against," (verse 34.)

We should observe that the words, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul, also," are between marks, and the words are called a "*parenthesis*;" they might be left out without hurting the sense. Let us read the sentence without them, that we may better perceive the meaning, (verses 34, 35.)

"A sign which shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Had Christ *not* been spoken against, many who despised him would have followed him. The people applauded him till they heard the scribes and Pharisees speak so much against him ; then they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him."

True religion is still spoken against. People must often give up the favor of the world, if they would be faithful to Christ. For a *time*, perhaps, they may profess to be religious, and lose nothing by it : but something soon occurs to try them, and to reveal the real state of their hearts. Is a young person willing to lose an opportunity of a good settlement, or a tradesman the favor of a rich customer, or a gentleman the respect of his acquaintance, sooner than disobey his Lord ? Then their *faithful* thoughts are revealed. Christ is now like a king disgraced ; only those who *really* love him will be faithful to him. But when he comes in his glory to take possession of his kingdom, he will not fail to remember those who are now cast out for his sake.

Evening Scripture portion. 1 Peter II. *Christ a stone of stumbling.*

LUKE II. 36-40.—*Anna the Prophetess.*

WE have read of Simeon's blessing the infant Saviour : and we now hear of another witness, even Anna, an aged prophetess.

Anna, it appears, had led a very holy life. We do not know her exact age ; but if she had been a widow eighty-four years, and if she had been married for seven years, she must have been at this time above a hundred, even supposing that she had married at a very early period of life. It is said that “ she departed not from the temple.” By this, we understand that she lived so near the temple, as to enable her to attend all its services. When, at nine in the morning, the lamb was offered on the altar, Anna was there ; and again at three, when the evening lamb was sacrificed, Anna was not absent. She delighted in the psalms continually sung in the holy courts ; she listened to the daily blessings of the priest. There are now many aged Christians, who, like Anna, dwell near some house of God, and delight in attending the services ; and, even when their power of hearing has failed, they yet take pleasure in joining in the prayers of God’s assembled saints. How sweet for them to think that they will soon ascend, where

“ Congregations ne’er break up,
And sabbaths never end.”

We hear also that Anna “ *served* God with fastings and prayers.” She not only fasted and prayed, but she *served* God when she fasted and prayed. She might have fasted and prayed, and *not* have served God ; because she might have done these things in a self-righteous spirit, as some of the Jews did, whom God reproves in Isaiah lviii., because they fasted and prayed, and yet were living in their sins.

It is said that Anna fasted and prayed “ *night and day* : ” no doubt she was occupied also in many good works, yet she lived in a constant habit of prayer. We are desired to pray without *ceasing*, and to *continue* in prayer, and this is what Anna did.

In one of St. Paul’s Epistles we read a description of such a widow as God approves, and we find that such a widow both prays constantly, and does all kinds of good works. It is written in 1 Tim. v. 5, “ She that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers *night and day*.” It is also written that a widow should be “ well reported of for good works : if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.” From these we see that a person may at once pray constantly and do good works also.

We are not told whether Anna came in by the Spirit, as Simeon did, or whether she had been called by some person, or whether she came in accidentally ; but we are told that when she did come in, she knew the infant Saviour as her Lord. “ She gave thanks.”

With what fervor Anna must have thanked the Lord ! None could sincerely thank God for Christ in an indifferent, cold manner. Could we thank a person for saving our lives in the same manner as we thanked him for doing us any trifling service ! Surely, if we thank our deliverer at all, we must thank him warmly. Have we ever given

our *warm* thanks to God for sending Jesus into the world? If we have only thanked him *coldly*, we have insulted him by our thanks.

Anna not only thanked God, she also spoke of Jesus to "all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." It is evident that there was a little company of persons there who were looking for redemption from *sin* through the promised Saviour.

How much refreshed Joseph and Mary must have been by the prayers and exhortations of Simeon and Anna! It is said by St. Luke, that they returned to their own city Nazareth; but we find from St. Matthew's history, that they did not return *immediately*; they went first to Bethlehem, afterwards into Egypt, and at length settled in Nazareth.

And now we turn from the aged saints to the holy child. There is but little said of him, but that little shows how holy a child he was. He "grew and waxed strong in spirit." Not only his limbs increased in strength, but his affection towards his Father waxed strong. It is a great mystery how this could be, for he was God; but we know that he had not only a human *body*, but also a human *soul*; and it was this *soul* that waxed strong. It is also written that he was "filled with *wisdom*:" his *human* mind received more and more knowledge by degrees, like the mind of another child. "The grace of God was upon him;" that is, the "*favor*" of God was upon him. God looked upon his human nature with favor, for as the *Son of God*, he was always *infinitely* beloved by the Father.

How different was he from other children, who generally grow more wayward and wilful as they grow older! Even if good impressions are made on their minds at six or seven years old, how often do they wear off when they become twelve or fourteen! their hearts seem to grow harder, and to love worldly things more. Was not this the case with some of us! Do we not often look back with sorrow upon the days of our childhood? Have we not reason to say with David, "Remember not the sins of my *youth*, nor my transgressions?" Perhaps some are now removed from us, whom we pierced by our heedless or perverse conduct. What would we give to recall the time and to act differently! but we can only express our penitence to God, and plead for his pardon.

Evening Scripture portion. 1 Tim. V. *A widow indeed.*

MATT. II. 1-8.—*The wise men's arrival at Jerusalem.*

WE find from St. Matthew's account, that our Saviour returned to Bethlehem after he had been presented to the Lord in the temple. Perhaps his parents intended to bring him up in Bethlehem, as it was the city of David their forefather. But God did not choose that his

Son should be brought up in a renowned city, but in the despised city of Nazareth ; and we shall see that he caused events to happen which obliged him to leave Bethlehem.

While the Redeemer was yet an infant, some wise men came to Jerusalem, inquiring for the King of the Jews. Who were these wise men ? They were heathen by birth, but it is not known from what land they came. They must have heard of the true God ; perhaps some Jews had instructed them. They had seen a star in the east, probably some light which they had never seen before. But how did they know that this star was the sign of the birth of the King of the Jews ? We must conclude that God *told* them *why* the star appeared ; but whether he told them in a dream, or by what other means, we are not informed. Many nations were at this time expecting some great deliverer to arise ; for the Jews knew from the prophets that such a deliverer would come, and as they were scattered over all countries, they had the opportunity to make their expectation generally known.

These wise men, when they came to Jerusalem, *openly* asked for the expected king, supposing that the Jews, who were God's own people, would know more about him than they did, and would be glad to receive him. Had these wise men known of Simeon and Anna, they would surely have inquired of them ; but they inquired of the chief men of Jerusalem, and these knew nothing of him.

"When Herod the king heard these things he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." (ver. 3.) This Herod was a very wicked man : he was an Edomite ; that is, he was descended from Esau, but he had become a Jew in religion ; and he had been appointed king over Jerusalem by the Romans, who had conquered the Jews. Herod shed much blood during his reign, and caused his own wife and two of his sons to be slain. He was afraid lest some person should take the crown from him, and therefore he was much alarmed when he heard the wise men inquire for the King of the Jews.

We may ask, "Why were the people in Jerusalem alarmed also, and why were they not rather glad at the thought of having another King ?" Perhaps they were afraid of Herod's filling the city with confusion and blood in opposing the new King. Herod was so artful, that, instead of telling the wise men of his fears, he pretended to assist them to find out where the child was. For this purpose he adopted a very wise method : he desired the chief priests and the scribes, who studied the Old Testament a great deal, to tell him where the expected Saviour would be born. They examined the writings of the prophets, and found that it was declared in the prophet Micah, that he should be born in the town of Bethlehem.

Only one thing more remained to be done ; to find out how old the child must be. Herod supposed that the star had first appeared at the time the child was born : he inquired of the wise men *when* it had appeared, and discovered that it was more than a year ago. He told the wise men to go to Jerusalem and to seek for a child of that age,

promising, when they had found him, to come and worship him also. He completely deceived the wise men by his hypocrisy; but what would all his plans avail against the Lord, who searches the hearts? The Lord, that sitteth in the heavens, laughs at all such attempts to injure him, as it is written in the *second* psalm, verse 2-4.

Herod is an instance that a man may *believe* the word of God, while he *hates* it. Herod *believed* that the prophets had spoken truly, and had known the place where Christ would be born; he *believed* that the Messiah would come; and yet he desired to destroy him, and thought it possible to effect his purpose. What madness this appears! It is the faith of devils: like Herod, they believe, and tremble. James ii. 19. Let us beware of having *such* a faith; a faith that will make us afraid of God, and yet not make us love him, or delight to please him. This faith will only make us miserable. How different was the faith of Simeon and Anna, of the poor shepherds, and of the wise men! They were filled with joy on account of a Saviour's birth. Have we ever rejoiced at the thought that Christ has been born into the world?

Evening Scripture portion. Ps. II.

Matt. II. 9-11. *The opposition of the wicked to Christ.*

MATT. II. 9-11.—*The wise men's journey to Bethlehem.*

HEROD had not been able to give the wise men exact information respecting the place where the King they sought would be found: he had only told them that he was in Bethlehem. But God did not leave them to search in vain. As they were on the way, the star they had seen in their own country appeared again, and stopped over the very house where the Saviour was. This star could not have been like the stars we behold in the height of the heavens, for one of those stars could not point out any particular house: it must have been a light, floating in the air.

No doubt the house in which Mary dwelt was a lowly one, but the wise men were not discouraged by its meanness from worshipping its glorious inhabitant. How often now does Christ dwell with the poor tenants of a cottage! How seldom is he found ruling in the mansions of the great, or the palaces of kings! Yet even among the rich, noble, and wise, there are a few who love their despised Saviour. These men from the East seem to have been rich, as well as wise; for they brought treasures with them from their native land, and laid them at their Redeemer's feet. What must have been their joy at that moment! If the sight of the star caused them to feel exceeding great joy, what transport the sight of the Lord himself must have occasioned! The luxuries, the splendor, the honor they had enjoyed in

their native land, can never have given them the satisfaction they felt when gazing on the glorious infant.

These men were very different from the shepherds of Bethlehem in their *circumstances*. The most remarkable difference between them was this; the shepherds were Jews, the wise men were Gentiles. They were the first Gentiles whose coming to Christ is recorded; their coming was a sign that Gentiles as well as Jews would be saved through him. How interesting this fact is to *us* who are Gentiles. Though Christ was born among the Jews, he is our Saviour as well as theirs. And his name is *now* known by millions of the Gentile nations; and it shall be known by every nation under heaven; for *all* nations shall serve him, and all kings shall fall down before him, as it is written in Ps. lxxii.

But let us not read the history of these wise men without seeking to learn something from their example. What *earnestness* they displayed in their search for the Saviour! They travelled far to seek him; they inquired diligently after him; they watched anxiously for the sign, when it had ceased to be visible, and rejoiced exceedingly, when it again appeared. Surely these wise men, by their conduct, condemn those who are living in Christian lands, unmindful of their Saviour. There are some who confess they know but little of him, and who yet seem unwilling to take any trouble to know him better. How would those wise men have valued our advantage! how dearly would they have prized one of our Bibles, one of our faithful ministers, one of our blessed Sabbaths! Some there are now among the poor heathen, who, by their eager desire to obtain a missionary, remind us of these wise men. An African chief sent two hundred oxen to a missionary settlement, hoping with them to purchase a teacher; such was his ignorance, that he thought he might obtain one by such means. Robbers seized upon his herd as it was being driven along. Though his disappointment was great, he did not abandon his project of obtaining an instructor. But while he was contriving some other method of gaining the precious boon, God, in his gracious Providence, directed the steps of some missionaries to his land. These good men were travelling to a more distant spot, but they could not resist the chief's earnest entreaties; they took up their abode in his country, and soon enlightened its darkness with the glorious beams of gospel light.* Did not that African resemble these wise men, and were not his hopes, like theirs, fulfilled? Here is encouragement for all those who desire spiritual blessings. The Lord will give them the desires of their heart.

Evening Scripture portion. Ps. LXXII. *Kings shall worship Christ.*

* See Moffat's Southern Africa, the beginning of the last chapter.

MATT. II. 12-15.—*The heavenly warnings.*

TWICE in a very little space God sent messages to his faithful servants in the dreams of the night. One dream was to warn the wise men not to inform Herod that they had found the infant King; the other was, to warn Joseph not to remain in Bethlehem. We perceive how easily God can defeat the plans of the wicked, as it is written in the fifth chapter of Job: "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise." There is a beautiful prayer in the liturgy, entreating God to exercise this power in our behalf. "Graciously hear us, that those evils which the craft, or subtlety of the devil or man, worketh against us may be brought to naught, and, by the providence of thy goodness, may be dispersed." We see how God dispersed those evils which Satan and Herod were working against the Son of God. Satan still stirs up wicked men to form plans against the children of God; and still the Lord, by his gracious providence, disperses these evils. Are we distressed at the thought of any malicious plan being formed against us, either by Satan or by our fellow-creatures? Let us pray to the Lord to defend us. No one can harm us, if we are followers of that which is good.

We have all heard of the Gunpowder-plot. What a diabolical scheme it was! The Roman Catholics had contrived a plan for blowing up the king of England, with his family and parliament, because they supported the Protestant religion; but God defeated their malicious design. One of the conspirators wrote a letter to Lord Monteagle, warning him not to go to the house of parliament, when the king next should open it. God gave such discernment to the king, that when Lord Monteagle showed him the letter, he suspected that a gunpowder-plot had been formed. Thus this dreadful evil was dispersed.

We find also many instances in the lives of God's servants, of the same gracious interference. The missionary Williams was saved from falling into the hands of four cruel heathens, who had determined to kill him. It was his custom to go sometimes to a neighboring island on Saturday to perform the Sabbath services. Four young men, who hated the Christian religion, offered to convey him to the island. They appeared as if they wished to show kindness to the missionary; but in reality they had agreed, when he was at a distance from the shore, to throw him into the sea. Williams accepted the offer. God, however, by a very trifling circumstance, rescued him from the snare. He had lately painted his boat with a peculiar kind of paint, that did not dry as quickly as he expected, and fearing to venture out to sea while his boat was in that state, he refused to go with those who desired to be his murderers. Thus was the wicked scheme frustrated. At length, indeed, he fell by the hands of cruel savages; but not till his *work* was done.

If we knew all the plans that Satan formed against *us*, we should be filled with wonder at the deliverances we experience. But perhaps we may remember some instances in our own lives, in which we discovered that the attempts of *men* to hurt us were frustrated. What wonderful proofs of the Lord's watchful care over his people will be revealed in another world! Then shall they know those things that they know not now. Then it will be found that Job was not the *only* saint whom Satan sought to cast down by the weight of his sorrows; nor Peter the *only* disciple that he desired to sift by the force of temptations; nor the blessed Saviour, the *only* child that he sought to cut off by an untimely death. Then it will appear how the Lord kept his people in the hollow of his hand from all the blasts of the enemy; and then there will ascend a chorus of hallelujahs from the happy redeemed, and from the glorious angels that were their appointed guard during the years of their weakness.

Evening Scripture portion. Job V. *Disappointment of wicked devices.*

MATT. II. 16-18.—*The Slaughter of the Babes.*

EVERY one who reads this passage must shudder at the dreadful cruelty of Herod. There was a singular barbarity in ordering the *babes* to be slaughtered; little creatures who could not have offended him, and were unable to resist him. Who can bear to think of the anguish of the mothers in that terrible day! When the firstborn of Egypt were slain by the destroying angel, the cry was terrible. Can it have been less terrible when the *youngest son* of many a mother was murdered by the pitiless executioner? We know that the mother's heart clings closely to her helpless infant. Tears and entreaties were all in vain: not only the babes of Bethlehem were slaughtered, but the babes in all the coasts or places round about.

We might be disposed to ponder how any human creature could perpetrate so atrocious a deed, did not the history of ungodly men disclose every kind of bloody act. This very Herod, just before his death, knowing how glad people would be when he expired, caused a number of Jews to be shut up, and desired that as soon as he was dead they should be killed; for by this means he hoped that the relations of the slaughtered Jews would be *obliged* to mourn. This command, however, was not obeyed. Such a king as Herod cared not for the lives of infants in comparison to his own security. Though few in a Christian land would dare to commit such *acts* of cruelty as Herod did, yet are not the *feelings* of unconverted men as selfish as his? Are we not *all* by *nature* so selfish, that we care not what calamities come upon others, if we gain any thing by them? For instance, are not people

glad of a war, if it will promote their trade, though they know war brings misery upon thousands of their fellow-creatures ?

How interesting was the fate of these infants ! they died in the Saviour's stead. Some have called them martyrs, because they died for Christ, though without their own knowledge. In the service of the Church of England they are spoken of as the *Innocents*. A babe may be called "innocent," because it has not yet committed any acts of sin ; still it has a sinful nature, and would, if it lived, sin as soon as reason dawned. There never was but one truly innocent babe : it was the infant Saviour.

Why is Rachel spoken of in the passage quoted by Jeremiah ? Because Rachel was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, and many of those babes were descended from her. She is represented in a poetical way, as weeping over her murdered offspring.

This was the scene on *earth*. How different were the scenes then witnessed in heaven ! What a multitude of happy spirits then entered together into glory ! David was comforted when he lost his little one, by the thoughts of beholding it again. He said to those who wondered at his cheerfulness, knowing, as they did, his affection for his child, "I shall go to him ; but he shall not return to me." 2 Sam. xii. 23. If David, who lived *before* the coming of Christ, was supported by this confidence, how much more ought parents who live *after* his coming to be consoled by such thoughts when they lose their darling infants ! Do not *they* know how Christ loved little children, and how he took them in his arms and blessed them, and how he said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven ?" The believing parent may feel assured that he shall see his child again among the cherub choir. Well may he love that Saviour to whose grace he owes the happiness of his departed little one.

Evening Scripture portion. 2 Sam. XII. 13-23

MATT. II. 19-23.—*Joseph's return.*

WHAT an important charge was committed to Joseph ! The care of the infant Saviour and of his mother. How honorable was the post he occupied ! He was a shield from the darts of the enemy to the blessed child. God did not leave him without assistance in performing his allotted work. Joseph knew not how to protect his little family ; he knew not when dangers awaited them, or when those dangers were removed.

In this chapter, God directs Joseph three times by dreams how to act ; he tells him when to depart into Egypt, when to return to Canaan, and in what city to fix his abode. Does not this kindness shown to

Joseph give us reason to expect that God will direct his people now, when they are perplexed and at a loss how to act? Persons who desire to act right, are often in much perplexity respecting the path of duty. They know not, in some cases, what plan it would be best to pursue; whether to settle in this village or in that town; to form an engagement with this person or with another; to go, or stay, to consent or to refuse, to speak or to be silent. Though they consult the Holy Word for wisdom, they can gain no light upon their path; though they consult pious friends, they can get no certain advice; and though they pray to God, they seem to obtain no answer. What then are they to do? Would the Lord direct them by a dream, how happy would they be! but no such dreams as Joseph had, are vouchsafed to them.

Is not the Lord, by their perplexities, teaching them *patience*? Is he not teaching them to *persevere* in prayer, and to feel more deeply their own weakness and ignorance? If they continue to look up to God, either some circumstance shall occur that shall show them the path of duty; or God will send some messenger (though not an angel) to point it out; or He himself will in some way or other make it clear to their minds. Or if he do not make it clear *before* the period of decision arrives, He will show them *afterwards* that their steps were ordered by Him. But no such guidance shall be granted to those who are not desirous to act uprightly. "The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble." Prov. iv. 19. This is the *threatening*; but the *promise* is, "In all thy ways acknowledge him; He shall direct thy paths." Prov. iii. 6.

Joseph, as we have already observed, was commanded in a dream to return to his own land. The angel said, "They are dead which sought the young child's life." It seems, therefore, that some one beside Herod sought to destroy Jesus; for the angel said, "*They* are dead." Perhaps this other person was Herod's eldest son Antipater; for he may have desired the destruction of the infant for the same reason as his father. This Antipater died a few months before Herod, but not a natural death. His father had unjustly suspected him of plotting against his life, and had caused him to be executed. Soon afterwards the bloody tyrant himself died in the most horrible torments: his illness began about the time of the slaughter of the innocent babes; in vain he travelled about his kingdom to obtain a cure; no earthly hand could heal him; his disease grew worse and worse, till he became intolerably offensive to all about him, and even to himself. He expired two years after the murder of the infants, eaten by worms.

Thus God often inflicts judgments on those who persecute his people. Several persecutors have died in the manner that Herod did, and others have been cut off suddenly in God's wrath. In this sudden manner a wicked Roman Catholic bishop of England once perished. His name was Gardiner. He had sworn that he would not eat till he had heard that two pious Protestant bishops had been burnt for the truth's sake. He generally dined at twelve. The news did not reach

him till four. He then sat down to dinner, and the first mouthful he took, he expired. Surely all men must have said, "This is the finger of God." True believers are dear to God as the apple of his eye, and those who dare to hurt or mock them, are abhorred by him.

Joseph and Mary must have been rejoiced to leave Egypt, the land of idols; for if David sighed after the services of the temple when absent from them, as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, surely these pious persons did so also.

It appears that they intended to live near Jerusalem, probably in Bethlehem, which was only seven miles distant; but when they arrived in Canaan, they heard that the Romans had appointed a cruel son of Herod's, called Archelaus, to be governor instead of his father; therefore they were afraid to remain near him. Joseph was then directed in a dream to go to Nazareth, where they had formerly lived. God chose that his Son should be brought up there, that he might be called a Nazarene. There is no prophet who has said *these very words*, but several have said that Jesus should be despised. The name Nazarene was very disgraceful, because Nazareth was a very mean and wicked city.

And did Jesus bear so despised a name? Ought we to be proud, when our great Lord was so humble? We are disposed to be ashamed of the meanness of our family, or circumstances, or education, and we are anxious to conceal such things from the world. This pride is very sinful, and comes to us from our first parents, who wished to be as gods. But Jesus has set his people an example of suffering contempt.

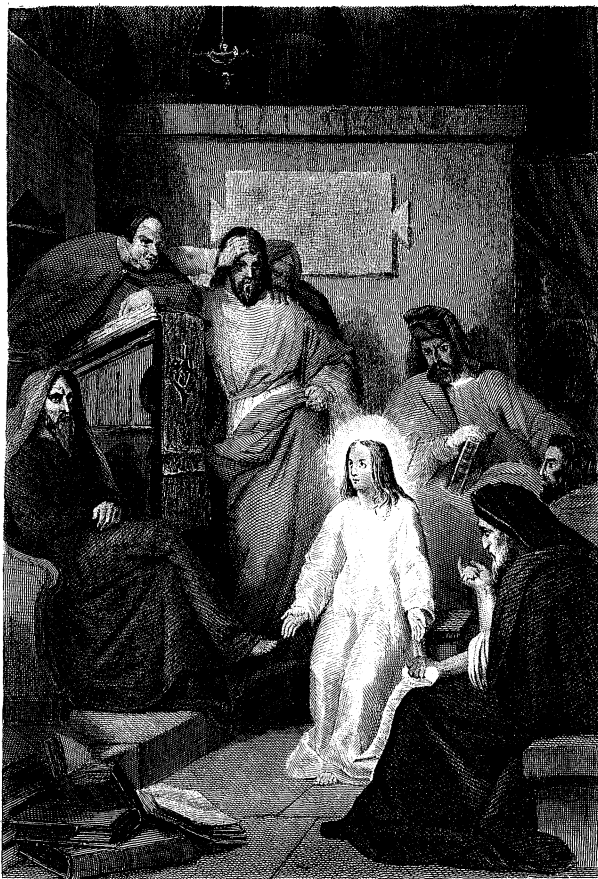
Evening Scripture portion. Prov. III. *Promise of direction.*

LUKE II. 41 to end.—*Christ among the doctors.*

WE only hear *one* anecdote of our Saviour in his childhood. We should like to hear many particulars concerning him in early life, but the Holy Spirit has caused us to know the things the *most* necessary, and it is more necessary that we should know what Christ said and did when he was a *minister* than when he was a *child*.

We find that his parents were accustomed to attend the passover at Jerusalem every year. The men were *commanded*, the women were *permitted* to attend this feast. At twelve years old it was the custom for boys to begin to accompany their parents, and at that age our Lord accompanied his parents.

The feast of the Passover continued seven days, during which time unleavened bread was eaten. The parents of Jesus fulfilled the days of the feast, that is, they remained *seven* days in Jerusalem, and then began to return homewards. There was a large company of persons



returning to Nazareth, distant about seventy-six miles from Jerusalem. The parents of Jesus at first supposed that the child was with some of their friends, till evening coming on, they sought him, and found him not. They returned with heavy hearts to Jerusalem, and found him in the temple. Altogether they had not seen him for three days ; they had gone one day's journey and returned during another day, and they saw him again on the third.

What was Jesus doing in the temple ? He was sitting in the midst of the doctors. These doctors were men learned in the scriptures, who explained them to the people : but they were not in general pious men. Was Jesus *teaching* the doctors ? Far from it. He was listening to them : for it was the custom for these doctors to instruct the young people, asking them questions, and answering their inquiries.

But we naturally wonder why Jesus did not *inform* his parents of his intention to remain longer in Jerusalem. No doubt he knew that it was his heavenly Father's will that he should *not* tell them, for he would not have caused them any useless sorrow. Probably God wished to remind Mary by this circumstance, that her Son was come into this world to do a great work, and that she must expect to find him continually engaged in it. All parents ought to be ready to give up their children for God's service, and to part with them to a distance, even as missionaries in a foreign land, if it be God's will. When the mother of the famous Wesley was asked, whether she was willing to part with her two sons, to go as missionaries to America, she answered, " Had I ten sons, I should rejoice that they should be so employed."

Mary gently reproached her son with having caused her and Joseph so much anxiety, (verse 48.) Accustomed no doubt to the most affectionate behavior from him, she was surprised at any conduct that *appeared* unkind.

Our Lord answered, " How is it that ye sought me ? Wist ye not, (or know ye not,) that I must be about my Father's business ?"

This reply was full of the dignity that belonged to him, as the Son of God. In his obedience to his mother on other occasions, he set an example to *all* children, but in his conduct on this occasion, he acted as became the King of kings and Lord of lords.

But what was the business which our Saviour said that his Father had given him to do ?

We can discover what it was from other parts of the Scriptures ! What did he come down from heaven for ? Was it for his own pleasure ? No, it was to do his Father's work. This work was the salvation of sinful man. In order to accomplish this salvation, he fulfilled the law that we have broken, and suffered the punishment due to us for breaking it. He began to fulfil the law, as *soon* as he came into this world. While yet a child of twelve years old, he was intent upon his great work. Therefore he said to his parents, " Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ?"

Has God sent us on any business? Yes! He has appointed to each of us a work to perform. A glorious work it is;—a work in which angels are always engaged, and of which they are never weary. It is *not* to accomplish our own salvation. That work Christ has done for all who believe in him. It is to promote the glory of God our Father. Yet who that looked around him and observed men's actions, would imagine that they had this work to do? What are the things about which men seem most anxious? Does not each seem to say, by his conduct, "How shall I please myself?" or "How shall I enrich myself?" or "How shall I gain credit to myself?" How few behave as if their chief desire was to *please God*! Yet is it not very sinful to be careless about pleasing him, who sent his Son to die for us? When that excellent minister, Dr. Payson, was on his dying bed, he said, "Oh how often have I begun the day thinking, 'How shall I please myself?' instead of 'How shall I please God?'"

Yet Payson had led a very holy life, and God had converted many sinners by him; but when a saint is dying he often sees his actions in a light in which he never saw them before. O that every one of us, now that life is before us, may seek to do our Father's business; for we know not how soon we may be called to render an account of the use we have made of our time upon earth.

Evening Scripture portion. 2 Cor. V. *Serving the Lord.*

MATT. III. 1-6.—*John preaches in the wilderness.*

WE hear nothing of John the Baptist during his youth, excepting that he was pious, and lived much in the deserts. When he was twenty-seven or thirty years of age he began to preach. He did not, however, go to the cities, but remained in the wilderness.

We may wonder how he found a congregation there. Probably his singular habits and his holy life had caused him to be much spoken of. He was clothed in a manner unlike persons of his station; for he wore a sort of cloth made of coarse camel's hair, and a leathern girdle; and he ate locusts, little animals, about an inch long, which, being nourished by leaves, are fit to eat; he fed also on honey, which is abundant in the woods and among the rocks of Judea. Men went into the wilderness to see him, and these bringing back a wonderful report of him, induced others to come, till at length crowds were collected to hear his sermons. God can easily draw people to hear his faithful ministers, if he will. No doubt John was rejoiced to behold such multitudes of persons, for he longed to point them all to the only Saviour.

What was the subject of his first sermons? Repentance! What is repentance? Is it change of conduct *only*? No; people who have

never repented, sometimes reform their lives. A person may see it to be his *interest* to lead a better life, and for that reason he may amend. Is it sorrow for sin? Sorrow is *part* of repentance, but there is a sorrow that is not repentance; sorrow for the *consequences* of sin is not repentance. Saul, the king of Israel, was sorry when he heard he had lost his kingdom by disobedience, but he was not sorry for his *sin*, only for his *punishment*. True repentance is a change of mind and *heart*. A man who really repents, feels grieved because he has offended God, and he longs to serve God better in time to come.

Can a person change his *own* heart? It is impossible; therefore we know that repentance must be the gift of God. Yet John told the people to repent, because he knew that God was willing to bestow repentance.

The chief object of John's ministry was to announce the coming of the Lord. This he did when he said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." No doubt he explained to the people the meaning of this declaration. We may understand its meaning by comparing it with other parts of Scripture. When Satan tempted our first parents to eat the forbidden fruit, he set up his own kingdom upon the earth; he became the god of this world. But God sent his son to dethrone Satan, and establish his own kingdom. As soon as a sinner believes in Christ, he passes into the kingdom of heaven, or of Christ. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Colossians, speaking of the Father, says, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."—Col. i. 13.

John the Baptist was like a herald who proclaims the approach of a glorious monarch, or like a pioneer who prepares his way through a desert. He knew that unless men repented of their sins, they would not receive the Saviour with gladness. He did not preach in vain. Many felt convinced of their sins, and anxious to be cleansed from their guilt and pollution; then they were baptized in Jordan, confessing their sins.

But could the waters of *Jordan* cleanse their souls? The waters of all the rivers in the world could not wash out one spot from the soul. Why then were they baptized? It had long been the custom for the Jews to baptize *heathens* who had forsaken idols for the worship of the true God. But John baptized the *Jews*, as a testimony that *they* also needed purification. At length he pointed to Jesus and cried, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." It is the blood of that Lamb which cleanses from sin, and that blood alone. The saints in heaven are now clothed in pure and spotless garments. But was it *baptism* that made them white? Hear what the Scripture saith, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the *blood of the Lamb*."—Rev. vii. 14.

MATT. III. 7-12.—*John warns the Pharisees and Sadducees.*

AMONG the people who came to hear John preach in the wilderness, were many of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Curiosity drew them to hear that famous preacher. It will be well to stop a moment to inquire into the character of these men. They were called Pharisees and Sadducees, *not* because they belonged to foreign nations, (as we call some persons French and some English,) but because they had particular opinions on religious subjects; they belonged to two *sects* among the Jews.

The Pharisees professed to observe all God's laws concerning sacrifices, tithes, and ceremonies, and also many *other* laws which *men* had made; and they thought that by doing these things they should be worthy of places in heaven. At the same time they did not love God, but loved money and the praise of men. Such was the character of the Pharisees.

Are there any Pharisees in these days? There are none of us who do exactly the same things as the Pharisees did, but there are many who have the same kind of righteousness; they wish to be religious, or at least to *appear* religious, and therefore they read the Bible, go to church, take the sacrament; and they think they are the better for these services, while their hearts are still full of the love of pleasure, or of money, or of praise. There is only one way of salvation—it is by believing in Jesus Christ; when we believe in him, our sins are forgiven on account of his sufferings, and our hearts are made holy by his Spirit. Are there any of us who are endeavoring to deceive God by a little outward service? Let us give up the vain attempt—God will not be mocked; unless we really wish to forsake *all* our sins, we are hypocrites, like the Pharisees.

But who were the Sadducees? They were unbelieving men, proud of their understandings, and who thought themselves much wiser than common people. They said that there were no angels nor spirits, and no rising again of the dead; and they sneered at those people who believed all the wonderful things written in the Bible. They only professed to believe the first five books of the Bible, called the books of Moses. Are there any Sadducees now? Alas! there are too many who resemble them. Such persons are called infidels, or deists. They have written many wicked books for the purpose of turning the Bible into ridicule. Their writings are poison to the mind, and they have destroyed many souls. There are numerous proofs that the Bible is the Word of God. To mention only one or two; behold the desolation of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews according to God's prophecy.

When these self-righteous Pharisees and scoffing Sadducees came to hear John preach, was he afraid of them, because they were rich and learned? Did he preach elegant sermons to please them? No;

he spoke plainly and faithfully to them. He said, "O generation of vipers;" he called them the seed of the serpent, or the children of the devil; he said, "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" he knew that because they were rich and learned, few would dare to warn them of the wrath to come; therefore out of love to their souls, *he* warned them. He did not tell them there was *no hope* for them, but he told them there was *no time* to lose. He knew that when he called them children of the devil, they would answer in their hearts, "We are the children of the pious Abraham, not of the devil; we have Abraham to our father." When ministers are preaching, people are very apt to be making some excuse in their hearts. John told the Pharisees that they would not be saved because they were the children of Abraham according to the *flesh*, for God could make the stones into Abraham's children; and God soon *did* make the *Gentiles*, whom the Jews despised as though they had been *stones*, into the children of Abraham in the *spirit*. Then John told them of their awful condition, while they were bringing forth bad fruit, or doing evil works. The axe, as it were, was laid ready to hew them down. Could we see death and judgment as near as they really are, we should tremble at the thought of continuing in sin.

St. Luke tells us in his gospel, (iii. 15,) that many people began to think that John was, perhaps, the Saviour so long expected—that is, the Christ, or the anointed one. Did John wish them to think this? No; he wished no glory for himself; he said that *his* baptism was nothing compared to that which Jesus would bestow. John could wash the *body* with water as a *sign* of repentance, but Jesus could wash the *soul* with the Holy Ghost; he could even cleanse it, as by fire. There is nothing cleanses like fire; *water* can not cleanse *gold* from its dross, but *fire* can. The Spirit of Christ can consume our sins, as fire consumes dross.

Then John showed the terrible consequences of not believing in this Saviour. He compared Jesus (v. 12) to a thrasher, who separates the wheat from the chaff. We are accustomed to hear of the *meek and gentle* Saviour, and so he is, for he wipes away the tear of the penitent, and binds up the wound of the broken-hearted; but he is also the *holy* Jesus; he cannot bear *proud* sinners, and at the last day his wrath against them will be so terrible, that they will call upon the rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. (Rev. vi.)

Evening Scripture portion. Phil. III. *The righteousness of Christ.*

LUKE III. 10–14.—*John instructs various classes in their duties.*

WE have seen that John the Baptist was a very faithful preacher; one who spoke to the *rich* as well as to the *poor* of their sins; but we

do not hear that the Pharisees and Sadducees took warning from his sermons; yet there were some persons who did. The people (that is, the common people, as they are called) said, "What shall we do, then?" What did they mean by this question? Did they mean, "What shall we do to be *saved*?" No, that was not the question. We read, in the Acts, of a penitent jailer who said to the apostle Paul and his friend Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be *saved*?" And they replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." (Acts xvi. 31.) No doubt John would have answered the people in the same manner, if they had asked him the same question; he would have said, "Believe in him who cometh after me."

But the people did *not* ask this question. John had just been exhorting them to bring forth *fruits* worthy of repentance, and had been telling them that every tree that brought forth bad *fruit* was cast into the fire. By fruit, you well know that he meant good works. John wanted the people to show by their conduct that their repentance was sincere. It must have gladdened his heart, when, after his sermons, they came to inquire *what* good works they ought to do. It is a good sign when people ask questions about their duties.

John, by his answer, shows us what was the *chief* sin of the people. He said, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat let him do likewise." The chief sin of the people was covetousness. These people were not all of them rich. Covetousness was the sin of the *poor*, as well as of the rich. As we read in Jer. viii. 10, "Every one, from the least, even unto the greatest, is given to covetousness."

Is this sin still very common? It is. People's hearts are still wrapped up in their property—their money, their clothes, their houses, their furniture, or their lands, whether they have little or much. People are so fond of their property that they are loath to part with any of it. But the word of God tells us that we should be ready to give—that we should even *labor* that we *may* have something to give. (Eph. iv. 28; Acts xx. 34, 35.)

Perhaps it will be asked, "Is it wrong to have *two* sets of clothes?" No; the expression "two coats," need not be taken *literally*. What then does it signify? That those who have *more* than enough for themselves, ought to give to those who have *less* than enough. The Scriptures do not *forbid* our saving against old age or sickness; but they *command* us to give to those who are in need. God will never suffer any one to languish in distress through following this command; he will raise up friends for them in the time of need. "Blessed is the man that considereth the poor." (Ps. xli. 1.) Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days. (Eccles. xi. 1.)

There was a poor servant who gave all her money to her destitute parents, she was overtaken by sickness early in life; she became unfit for service, and had no means of support; but God put it into the heart of the Rev. Thomas Scott (who wrote the Commentary on

the Bible) to take her into his house, and, though not rich himself, with the aid of some of his friends, he gladly supported her all her days, thinking it a blessing to have so pious a person in his family. Where could she have passed her life in greater peace than beneath the roof of a faithful minister?

If people spend their money, when young, in pleasures, in fine dress, or in useless things, there is no promise for *them* to depend upon; but if they delight in giving for God's sake to the poor, they shall never be forsaken.

The *publicans* also asked John what they must do. These publicans were not like the publicans of these days; they did not keep public-houses; they collected the *public* taxes for the Romans. Their chief sin was *dishonesty*. They made people pay more taxes than the government required, and by their impositions they enriched themselves. In most trades and employments there is some temptation to dishonesty, and many people think that they may do whatever it is the *custom* to do. Let each of us inquire, "Is there any thing I do in my station, that I wish to conceal from my master or my customer?" That practice is *dishonest*, however *common* it may be. If you really repent, you will leave it off, though others should call you over strict and precise, and even try to injure you, because your conduct is a reproach to them.

Some *soldiers* next inquired what they must do. Does it surprise us to find that even *soldiers* had been moved by John's preaching? War is a terrible calamity. Were all men true Christians, there would be no war; yet John did not tell the soldiers to leave off being soldiers, for the *guilt* of unjust wars lies rather upon those who begin and continue them, even kings and rulers, than upon the men who are hired to fight. John warned the soldiers against the sins most common in their profession. One of these was violence; the soldiers were apt to take things away by force; therefore John said, "Do violence to no man." They were also accustomed to accuse others falsely before the judges, perhaps for the sake of bribes; therefore he said, "Nor accuse any man falsely." They were also disposed to be discontented with their pay; therefore he said, "Be content with your wages."

Should *we* like to inquire of John the Baptist what *we* ought to do? He would not give us all the *same* answer; he would point out *different* duties to us according to our station, as servants or masters, parents or children; or according to our trade or profession. But need we wish that John the Baptist were risen from the dead, that he might instruct us? Let us look into the epistles of Paul and Peter, and we shall find directions to servants and masters, to parents and children. Servants are desired to be meek, honest, and submissive; masters to be just and kind; children to be obedient and respectful. Parents are commanded to bring up their children piously, and not to provoke them to wrath. Young men are instructed to be sober-minded; young women to be keepers at home. Older men and women are warned

against the love of wine. (See the epistles to Titus, and to the Colossians, and the first epistle of Peter.) Thus we are all set on our guard against the temptations of our age and station.

No doubt if people had come *separately* to John, he would have given still more particular directions. *Each of us* has some *particular* sin into which he is very apt to fall; one is most disposed to anger, another to vanity, another to envy, another to idleness, and another to intemperance.

We shall never *deserve* heaven by leaving off our sins; it is Christ who has purchased heaven by his blood to bestow it on those who believe in his name. But if we do *really* believe we shall bring forth good fruit, and forsake our sins. It is God only that can change our hearts; but we must not *wait* till we *feel* right *feelings*, before we *begin* to *act* right. We must avoid every thing that we know to be wrong, and entreat God to overcome the evil feelings of our hearts, (which *we* cannot subdue,) and to enable us to do that which is pleasing in his sight.

Evening Scripture portion. Titus II. *Relative duties.*

MATT. III. 13, to the end.—*The baptism of Christ.*

ONE of the most wonderful events ever transacted on this earth is recorded in this passage.

We behold the Son of God in great humility coming to be baptized of John, as though he had been a sinner; and we behold the Everlasting Father and the Spirit, honoring him with unspeakable honor. Well might John be surprised to see the Son of God apply to him for baptism! He objected to baptizing one so much greater than himself, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" It appears, therefore, that John knew who he was; yet we read in St. John's gospel (i. 33) that he knew him not; God therefore must have made John know him at the *time* of the baptism. It may appear strange that John should not have known him, as Elizabeth, his mother, was the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus; but then we must remember that they had been brought up in distant parts of the land. God had wise reasons for not permitting them to be known to each other till this time. If John had known Jesus before as a relation, it might then have been supposed that he had been deceived by him; but now that he had never seen him, no deception could be suspected.

How full of reverence and humility were John's words—"I have need to be baptized of thee,"—*baptized*, not with *water*, (for Jesus baptized none in this manner,) but with the Holy Ghost and with fire,

The angel had declared that John should be filled with the Holy Ghost, even before his birth ; still John felt his need of the Saviour's baptism. Does not this teach us that we *all* need this baptism continually ? Though we have been baptized with water, though we have even undergone a change of heart, yet still we need fresh supplies of the Holy Spirit. If we *feel* our need, we shall come often to Jesus, that he may baptize us. Blessed Jesus, we have need to be baptized of thee !

What was the Saviour's *reason* for coming to be baptized ? He condescends to explain it—"Thus, it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." It was God's will that *all men* should be baptized, and therefore it was necessary that Jesus, when he was a man, should be baptized, for he came to do *all* God's commands, that by *his* obedience many might be made righteous. Whom did our Saviour mean by *us*, when he said, "It becometh *us* to fulfil all righteousness ?" Himself and John. It was necessary that John should do the will of God, and baptize him whose shoes he was not worthy to bear. True Christians feel their unworthiness to do any thing for their Master, but this feeling ought not to hinder them from doing God's work ; for they would not be *fit* to do it, unless they *felt* their exceeding sinfulness.

Immediately after the baptism, the Saviour came out of the water. We find in St. Luke's gospel, what he was doing as he came out ; he was *praying*. When sinners were baptized, they confessed their sins ; but he had no sins to confess.

After he had humbled himself by being baptized, his Father exalted him by sending the Holy Spirit down upon him, and by declaring, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

What must John the Baptist have felt when he beheld this scene ! Here were no terrors like those on Mount Sinai ; here were no thunders nor lightnings ; no blackness, and darkness, and tempest ; all was light, and peace, and love. It is wonderful to think, that a mortal man should have been permitted to witness such a display of the divine glory. But as John was appointed to direct men to the Saviour, it was right that he should receive the strongest proof of his being the Son of God. And could he have received *stronger* proof than he did receive on the banks of Jordan ? Impossible.

What exceeding love is expressed in the words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased !" This declaration must have comforted the heart of the man of sorrows ; though the world hated him, he knew the Father loved him. Would it comfort us to think the Father loved us, and was well pleased with us ? If we believe in Jesus he *does* love us, and *is* well pleased with us for *his sake*. All believers are "accepted in the beloved !" What sweet words are those ! They have sustained the children of God in a dying hour. How could any man bear the thought of entering God's presence, were it not for

the assurance that the Father will receive him in the name of his own beloved Son !

Evening Scripture portion. Eph. I. "*Accepted in the beloved.*"

MATT. IV. 1-7.—*The temptation of Christ.*

WE have read of the great honor that Christ received at his baptism. Immediately afterwards, he was exposed to terrible sufferings and temptations. It is God's method often to prepare his people for great sufferings, by granting them great consolations beforehand. Jesus was "led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." He fasted forty days and forty nights. He was alone amidst the wild beasts of the desert ; as it is written in Mark i. 13, " he was with the wild beasts." This wilderness was probably the same as that through which Moses led the Israelites. We are told in Deut. viii. 15, what kind of a place it was ; a place " wherein were fiery serpents, scorpions, and drought, where there was no water." The prophet Jeremiah calls " it a land of deserts and pits ; of the shadow of death, that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt," (ii. 6.) But what was more terrible than all, when Jesus was there, Satan came to assail him with temptations. He had just heard the Father's voice ; he had just been anointed by the Holy Spirit ! Behold him now in this horrible place, with his more horrible enemy, Satan.

Now observe, that it is said that he was led up of the *Spirit*. It was his Father's will that he should meet Satan as an enemy in battle. He had come into the world to destroy his works, and to bruise this serpent's head, according to God's threatening to Satan in paradise. "The seed of the woman shall bruise thy head." Satan probably hoped to overcome Jesus, as he had overcome Adam and Eve ; but though he could not overcome him, he did give him pain ; for it is written, concerning Christ, " He *suffered* being tempted," (Heb. ii. 18.) It will be very interesting for us to consider his temptations, especially as Satan still offers the same temptations to Christ's people that he once offered to Christ himself. These temptations will show us how he tries to draw away those who have escaped from his chains. The world in general are led captive by him according to his will ; he finds it easy to keep them in his power ; but O ! what pains he takes to regain his sway over those who have left his service ! Let us consider the first temptation that he offered to our Saviour. He said, " If thou be the Son of God, command these stones that they be made bread." Observe the *time* at which he made the proposal ; when Jesus was an *hungered*. Why did Jesus refuse to turn the stones into bread ? Be-

cause his Father had engaged to provide him with bread ; therefore he needed not to use his divine power in supplying his own wants.

Satan often attacks the people of God in times of deep affliction. When they are sorely diseased, or when their children are dying, or when they know not how to provide them with food, or when they are disappointed or unkindly treated ; then the malicious fiend insinuates hard thoughts of God into the mind. He would fain make them believe that God has forgotten them, that their troubles will never end, that there is no way of escape, and that they must try to help themselves, even by some *wrong* means. If there seem a way of helping themselves by doing something not quite upright, not quite open, or honest, not quite according to the commands of God, Satan recommends them to take that away, assuring them, that if they are too conscientious, they will never get out of their difficulties. But how did our Saviour overcome this temptation ? He referred to the word of God, and answered from Deut. viii., "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." What is the meaning of this passage ? It declares that the word of God is more than bread ; bread cannot keep us alive, when God chooses that we shall die ; but God can keep us alive without bread, when He chooses that we shall live. We know also that God can make us happy in the greatest affliction ; but nothing can make us happy, if God wills that we shall be unhappy. Have we not seen persons miserable in the midst of abundance, and happy in the midst of pains and losses ? Let us never listen to Satan's wicked counsel, when he would induce us to sin that we may escape from suffering. He is deceiving us. When the sin is committed, we shall find ourselves in a far worse case than we were before.

The second temptation was exactly the opposite of the first. Satan took Christ to the pinnacle, or high tower of the temple in the holy city of Jerusalem. He there tried to deceive him by quoting Scripture ; he referred to a passage in Ps. xci., "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee ;" but he left out the words, "To keep thee in all thy ways." Yet these are very important, and ought not to be left out. God will command his angels to guard the Christian from harm *in all his ways*, that is, in all the ways in which he *ought* to walk. Had Jesus cast himself down from the temple, he would not have been walking in God's ways, but in Satan's ways.

This is the manner in which Satan tries to deceive the Christian, when he sees him full of confidence in God. He then tempts him to presumption : he would persuade him that he need not watch and pray, but that he may go into worldly scenes, and receive no harm. He says to him, "Has not God promised to keep you from falling, and to preserve you to his heavenly kingdom ? Has he not said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee ?'" Thus he perverts the word of God. This is a very dangerous moment for the Christian. Let him then remember what his Lord replied to Satan ; these words from Deuteron-

omy, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." We tempt God to forsake us, when we thus presume upon his promises. The apostle says, in 1 Cor. x., "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We have heard of Peter's sin: he ventured to follow Jesus into the palace of the High Priest, and to warm himself among the ungodly servants, thinking that he could never deny his Master; thus he tempted the Lord, and he *did* deny him.

What dangers there are on the right hand and on the left! One moment we sink into distrust; the next, soar into presumption. Let us watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation.

Evening Scripture portion. Deut. VIII. *The wilderness.*

MATT. IV. 8-11.—*The same continued.*

THOUGH Jesus had resisted *two* temptations, Satan was not dismayed. Here we have an instance of the *perseverance* of our great enemy. Though he may have failed in one attempt to injure us, he will make another, and sometimes he succeeds better the second time than he did the first. Balaam resisted the *first* temptation, and refused to go with Balak's messengers; but he was tempted a *second* time, and then he yielded. The man of God from Judah refused the invitation of Jeroboam, but was enticed by the solicitation of the old prophet. Satan was not discouraged when Job was patient under his first trials: he asked God to permit him to assault him again; but that *second* time he still failed to tempt Job to curse his God. We ought to learn, from these facts, to be very watchful after we have overcome one temptation, and to be ready for another attack.

There is one circumstance in the third temptation which may surprise us. Satan proposed a more glaring sin to our Lord than he had proposed before; for it is a much more glaring sin to fall down and worship Satan than to turn stones into bread, or to run unnecessarily into danger. How could Satan suppose that when Jesus had refused to commit those sins, he would consent to so flagrant a transgression as worshipping the devil? Perhaps he saw that it was vain to try to *deceive* our Saviour; therefore he declared his purpose, and hoped to persuade by the greatness of the *bribe*. He had not offered him such a *reward* before, as the kingdoms of the world: he had ruined the first Adam by promising him a *reward* for disobedience, and he hoped to ruin the second Adam by the same means.

What is that glory of the kingdoms of the world which Satan displayed before our Lord?

It may be divided into three principal points—pleasure, profit, and praise: these tempt men to forsake God's service. It is *not true* that

Satan can give them to whom he will. When Satan offered them to Christ, he offered what it was not in his power to bestow. In saying that he could bestow them, he acted in his own character of a liar and the father of lies. It is, however, true, that God often permits the servants of Satan to enjoy the vain delights of this world : thus we read in the Psalms, that the wicked are often in prosperity.

How did Jesus overcome the last temptation ? By the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit. He spoke *openly* to Satan, and declared that God had commanded that men should worship him *alone*. He did not dispute with the tempter, or tell him that the world was not his to bestow, or that it was a perishing portion, but he simply appealed to the *command* of God. Thus we are taught how to meet Satan's temptations. We ought not to stand questioning ; but we should remember the *command* of God, and not take any step in life, or follow any course which will lead us into sin. How many warnings are there in the Scriptures against the love of the world, its pleasures, its profit, and its praise. This is what the Scripture says of worldly *pleasure*, (1 Tim. v. 6,) "She that liveth in *pleasure*, is dead while she liveth." One of our most faithful female missionaries, Mrs. Judson, was first aroused when a vain and worldly girl, by reading this sentence. Afterwards she went to the East, and suffered great persecution for the truth's sake, and now she is with God, drinking rivers of pleasure at his right hand. And what does the Scripture say against the love of profit, or of *money* ? 1 Tim. vi. 10. "*Which*, (that is, *money*,) while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Now hear what is said of those who seek human *praise*. We read in John xii. 42, 43, of some who believed in Christ, and yet would not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue ; "for they loved the *praise* of men more than the praise of God."

Satan will offer these things to our acceptance, (not *all* of them, but *little portions* of them,) upon condition that we worship him, that is, do his will in some respect ; for he cares not for *knee*-worship ; he knows that we are really the servants of *him* whom we *obey*, and not of him whom we *call* Master. May the Lord give us grace to resist, through our Captain, who has overcome, and is set down upon his throne.

How soon the blessed Saviour found obedience to be sweet ! The angels came, and fed him. Thus God will more than make up to us, even in *this* life, all we give up for his sake. When he has filled our hearts with the peace which passeth all understanding, we shall not regret the loss of any earthly thing !

Evening Scripture portion. Gen. III. *The fall of man.*

JOHN I. 19-34.—*The record of John concerning Christ in Bethabara.*

DURING the time of the Lord's temptation, John was preaching in the wilderness. Many supposed he was the promised Saviour; for though he did no miracle, (John x. 41,) he was evidently a very wonderful prophet. There were in Jerusalem seventy chief men, who met together to consult about public matters, and who were called the council, or the Sanhedrim. These Jews were proud and unbelieving. They sent a company of priests and Levites to ask John who he was, probably supposing that he would readily answer persons who filled holy offices, especially as he himself was a priest. But he did not wish men to honor him, and he plainly told these priests he was not the Christ. Then they wanted to know whether he was Elias or Elijah; for Malachi the prophet had declared that Elijah should come before Christ came, (iv. 5, 6.) But though John had come in the spirit and power of Elijah, he was not Elijah himself. The priests then asked him whether he was *that* prophet. *What* prophet did they mean? They meant to ask whether John was *any* one of the old prophets risen from the dead. He declared that he was not, and then told them who he was: A voice crying in the wilderness. But these priests were not satisfied with the answer: they wanted to know why he baptized, as if he were some great person, and had great authority. As they were of the sect of the Pharisees—those formal self-righteous persons—they must have been much offended with John for having once called them a generation of vipers. John took this occasion to praise the Lord Jesus, and to speak of his greatness. He even told them that he stood among them, though they knew him not.

The next day John was able to point out the unknown Saviour to the people who surrounded him; but we are not told whether these priests were still near or not. How remarkable is the name by which he called his Lord! "The Lamb of God." Why did he give him this name? Was it because he was meek and gentle? Not chiefly for that reason; but because he was to be sacrificed for the sins of men. A lamb was offered up at the temple every morning and evening; its blood could not take away sin; but there was a Lamb whose blood could take away the sins of the *world*! Consider how immense the sum of the sins of the world must be! The sins that one of us commits in one day are very numerous. If all our proud thoughts could be known, and all our rebellious feelings against God could be exposed, how vast would be the amount! But consider what millions of millions of men have lived on this earth; what treachery, what blasphemy, what murders, what idolatry, have defiled it in every place, at every moment. Yet all these multiplied crimes Jesus can take away; so great is the power of his blood. O that all the world would

come to the Lamb of God, that they might *all* be cleansed from their innumerable transgressions.

Evening Scripture portion. Numb. XXVIII. 1-25. *The daily burnt-offerings.*

JOHN I. 35-42.—*Andrew leads Simon to Christ.*

IT WAS with great delight that John the Baptist pointed sinners to the Saviour. He had no greater joy than to see men leave him to follow Christ. On one occasion he saw the Lord, probably at some distance from the place where he stood, and he pointed him out to two of his disciples; for John had disciples, or persons who followed him to learn his doctrine. He was more pleased that they should follow the great Master, than that they should stay with him. Behold in John the spirit of true religion! The faithful minister does not wish to be admired himself, but tries to persuade all to admire Christ.

Who were these two disciples? One of them was called Andrew: but we are not informed of the name of the other. *Perhaps* the other was that John who was afterwards called the disciple whom Jesus loved. One reason for thinking so is, that he wrote this account, and it is usual with him not to mention his own *name*, when he refers to himself.

It signifies little, however, to us, what were the names of these disciples. Let us imitate their blessed examples. See them following Jesus. At first his back was towards them; but he knew well they were following him, and soon gave them kind encouragement. He said, "What seek ye?" They replied, "Master, where dwellest thou?" It was not from curiosity they desired to see his abode, but that they might know him and converse with him. How sweet were the hours which they spent with their Saviour in his lowly dwelling, his cottage in the wilderness!

Would he welcome *us*, as he did those disciples? Yes; he says *to us*, as he did to them, "Come and see." Are we willing to go? Do we desire to know him, and to taste his grace? He will meet us in secret prayer, and make himself known to our hearts. But does he ever find us in prayer? or are we so taken up with the world, that we have no time to seek the Lord?

Let us observe the conduct of one of these disciples after he had found the Saviour. "He first findeth his own brother Simon." How anxious he was to bring his dear brother to the knowledge of his precious friend! He tells him what a treasure he himself has found, and invites his brother to share it. Are we acting thus? Are we trying to persuade our kindred and our friends to come to Christ? What pains some have taken to bring brothers or sisters to Christ! they have sent them letter after letter—they have visited them in sickness;

have persuaded them to hear faithful ministers—have prayed without ceasing to bless their efforts. David Nasmith, the founder of town-missions, sent a letter every week to his ungodly brother, till at length he brought him to Christ.

As soon as Simon approached the Saviour, he received encouragement. Jesus gave him a new name, to describe the new character he should bear. He called him Cephas, or Peter, which the one in Hebrew, and the other Greek, signifies “a stone.”

And why was Simon to be called “a stone?”

The Lord intended to build a great temple of living stones, that is, of believers, and he chose Simon to be one of the foundation-stones. He purposed to make him a great preacher, so that many should believe through his word, and thus be built upon him; therefore he compared him to a “stone.”

The scriptures declare that the saints “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord.”—Eph. ii. 20, 21.

Jesus knows each of us as well as he knew Simon. He knows whether we are living stones in this glorious temple, or whether we are like the rubbish lying round the building, to be swept away when it is finished.

Evening Scripture portion. Is. LV. *Invitation to come to Christ.*

JOHN I. 43 to end.—*Philip leads Nathanael to Christ.*

It is very interesting to know how holy men were brought to the knowledge of Christ. In this passage we have an account of the means by which Philip and Nathanael were first led to their Saviour. Jesus himself found Philip, and said, “Follow me.” Have we heard the voice of Jesus thus speaking to our hearts? He *does* thus call to us from heaven. May we have grace to reply, “Lord, I will follow thee.” When David heard the Lord say, “Seek ye my face,” he replied, “Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” (Ps. xxvii.)

Philip acted as Andrew had done before; he endeavored to persuade his friend to come to Jesus. He behaved openly and frankly to Nathanael; he did not conceal from him that the Lord he had found was called Jesus of Nazareth. Nathanael was prejudiced against Nazareth because of the bad character of its inhabitants, and naturally exclaimed, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip did not stop to argue with him, but said, “Come and see.” He was full of hope that the same word which had such power with him would convince Nathanael also. Philip sets us an example how to behave to our rela-

tions and friends. It is better to say, "Come and see," than to argue much with them. Let us try and persuade them to read the Bible which has taught us to pray to that God who has had mercy on us. If we can only induce them "to come and see," to apply to the Lord themselves, we may feel sure that they will be brought to the knowledge of the true Saviour.

With what great kindness did the Lord treat Nathanael ! He knew that he had doubts, and he removed them. He did this in a very remarkable way. When he saw him coming he described his character. "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile or deceit." By saying this, he showed Nathanael he was acquainted with his secret thoughts. He declared that Nathanael was a *sincere* man : this was great praise. Jesus had seen many hypocrites, but he had seen few *sincere* persons. It is very uncommon to be sincere. Most persons *think* they are sincere. They will say, "Though I do not pretend to be religious, yet I am not a hypocrite—I am sincere." But these people deceive themselves. Let us consider what it is to be sincere. It is to be really anxious to find out our sins, and to forsake them. The sincere man says, with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me, and know my *thoughts*, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24. The sincere man desires that every evil *thought* may be taken away ; he longs to have his *heart* cleansed ; therefore he is often in prayer to God, confessing his sins. As soon as he *suspects* that any of his practices are wrong, he inquires whether they really are sinful ; and if he finds they are contrary to God's word, he forsakes them, however much he may lose by giving them up. Is this a *common* character ? Is this *our* character ? Do we *thus* walk with God ? Does Jesus say of you or me, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile ?"

Nathanael was surprised to find that Jesus knew him, but he was more astonished still when he discovered that he had seen him under the fig-tree. No doubt he had been confessing his sins beneath the shade of a thick fig-tree, where no human eye could see him. God had answered his prayers, by leading him to the Saviour. Nathanael could no longer doubt ; he acknowledged Jesus to be the Son of God, the King of Israel.

Then Jesus promised that the day should come when he should see angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man. To what day did he refer ? Was it not to the day when he will come again in the glory of his Father with all his holy angels ? Both his enemies and his friends will then perceive that he is the Son of God. *Every eye* shall see Him, (Rev. I.) Some shall wail when they see Him whom they despised and neglected, sitting on the throne of judgment ; but *some* will *rejoice* when they behold *Him* to whom they often prayed under fig-trees or in closets, sitting on his throne of glory amidst ten thousand times ten thousand angels. Are there any here who often pray

to Christ in secret? Is it not a comfort to you to think that he sees you, and that he will acknowledge you as his children at the great day?

Evening Scripture portion. Ps. CXXXIX. *God's all-seeing eye.*

JOHN II. 1-10.—*Jesus turns water into wine.*

THE Lord Jesus began his ministry by a miracle. Several of his disciples beheld this display of his power. It is probable Nathanael was one of them; for though he is not mentioned in the list of the twelve apostles, it is generally supposed that Bartholomew, the apostle, was the same person as Nathanael.

When Jesus had been three days in Galilee he went to a marriage feast. It is plain, therefore, that there are some feasts to which it is not sinful to go. We are sure, however, that Jesus would not have gone to a feast where there was profaneness, drunkenness, or rioting; nor would the newly-married have invited such a holy guest, if they had intended to give an unholy feast. Wine was the common drink of the land of Canaan, and was not so strong as the wine used in this country, which is mixed with brandy. As grapes grew in the fields of Canaan, wine was so cheap that even poor people could afford to drink it. It is probable that the newly-married were poor persons, because Jesus himself, as well as his disciples, was poor, and he had not yet become celebrated as a prophet. Poverty may have prevented them from providing sufficient wine for the company. When the store was exhausted, the mother of Jesus spoke to him as if she expected her son to provide more by a miracle; she said, "They have no wine." The Lord's answer may *appear* disrespectful, but it was not so. In the Eastern countries "woman" is as respectful a title as "madam" would be here; and even princesses are thus addressed. When Jesus said, "Woman, what have I to do with thee, mine hour is not yet come;" he meant to show his mother, that though he had obeyed her commands in common things, he could not be directed by her in his *heavenly* Father's business. He had told her this when he was a child, and was found by her in the temple. The Roman Catholics, therefore, much mistake when they entreat Mary to *command* her Son to bestow blessings on them.

And do not *we* also mistake when we venture to dictate to Jesus?—when we think he *ought* to give us any blessing, or remove any affliction? When we thus think in our hearts, let us hear Jesus addressing us in these words: "What have I to do with thee; mine hour is not yet come." Perhaps He may intend to do what we desire; but we must not hasten him, his *own* time is the best.

The mother of our Lord still expected that her Son would do some

wonderful deed, and she said to the servants, "Whatsoever *he* saith unto you, do it." This was a safe command to give. We may say this to each other at all times. "Whatsoever *he* saith unto you, do it."

You know that the Jews had many customs about purifying or washing themselves : some of these customs were commanded by God, and some were invented by men. They always kept large jars for water in their houses. These jars Jesus desired the servants to fill ; they obeyed without questioning, and even drew out the water to hand to the ruler of the feast, without knowing what they presented. The jars were filled to the *brim*, so that it was certain that no wine could be added secretly to the water.

The ruler of the feast was a man who had the management of it intrusted to him by the bridegroom. He was surprised to taste such excellent wine, and calling the bridegroom, expressed his surprise that he should have kept the good wine until the *last*, when men usually give the *best* wine *first*, as the flavor is most relished at the beginning of a feast. In this speech the ruler bore witness, without intending it, to the excellence of Christ's works, and gave his testimony to the perfection of the miracle.

How benevolent a miracle this was ! It showed forth Christ's tender concern for our comfort even in the smallest matters ; though he would not turn the stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger, he turned water into wine to supply the guests at the marriage feast. But his chief purpose in working this miracle was to show forth his glory as the Son of God, that his people might believe in him to everlasting life. He can bestow upon us that *wine* which will make our hearts glad throughout eternity. All who come to him will find reason to say, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." It is his method to keep the best things to the *last* : but it is Satan's method to do the reverse. The children of this world have their best things *first*. They find life grow darker and darker as they advance ; their youthful days are their happiest, (they confess this themselves ;) cares soon overcloud them, disappointments depress them, infirmities overtake them ; the gloom continually increases, till it ends in the darkness of the grave. Such is the worldling's portion. Satan gives the *good* wine first, and *then* that which is *worse*. What a miserable portion is the world !

Christ deals just in a contrary manner : "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth *more* and *more* unto the perfect day." Every truly religious person finds his happiness increase with his age ; so that he would not be as he was once, no, not for the sake of again possessing youth, and health, and relations, and comforts, which he may now have lost. The *more* religious he becomes, the *more* happy he finds himself. Even upon *earth* he begins to say, "Thou hast kept the good wine until now." What then will he say in *heaven*, when he drinks of the fruit of the vine with his Saviour ; that is, when he partakes of the sweetness of redeeming love in all its perfection ! This

happiness is offered to us. Shall we reject it, and prefer looking for our happiness from a world which is withering in our grasp?

Evening Scripture portion. Prov. IV. *The path of the just.*

JOHN II. 11-17.—*Christ purifies the temple.*

AFTER working his first miracle, the Lord Jesus went to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, but he did not take up his abode there at present. Highly favored city, to be so early and so often visited by the Son of God! Truly she was exalted unto heaven, so great were her privileges. Do not we also enjoy very great privileges—*we*, who hold the word of God in our hands? May we profit more from our privileges than Capernaum did from hers!

Shortly after visiting this city, the Lord travelled up to Jerusalem, to keep the passover. In the gospel of St. John, all the passovers from this time till the Lord's death are recorded. It is by counting them, that it has been discovered how long Jesus exercised his ministry, and at what age he died. He became a minister at thirty, his ministry lasted three years and a half; and he died at the age of thirty-three years and a half.

When he was at Jerusalem at the passover, he made a public display of his power and holiness. The *courts* of the temple (not the very temple itself) were crowded by those who brought beasts and birds for sacrifices, and also by those who changed Roman money for Jewish coins, to be cast into the treasury. No doubt these traders in animals and money excused themselves for making God's house a place of trade by the thought of the holy use for which the animals and money were designed. But this excuse was not sufficient in God's sight. His temple was called a house of *prayer*, and it was made into a house of *merchandise*. He was displeased by the disturbance given to his worship, and by the disrespect shown to himself. And may there not be customs common among Christians which are displeasing to God? We may have excuses ready to offer for our conduct; but are they *such* as will be received at the day of judgment?

It was wonderful that the people selling animals and changing money submitted to the authority of a poor and almost unknown man, armed only with a whip, and unsupported by the rulers. But such divine power accompanied his words and his actions, and such terror from the Lord spread among the multitude, that the traders fled before him. At the same time, Jesus openly declared that he was the Son of God, for he called the temple his "*Father's house*." The disciples were much struck by their Lord's conduct; they were no doubt astonished to see one usually so meek and gentle, acting with so much boldness and

courage. Then they remembered a sentence in the Psalms, describing the character of the expected Messiah: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." (Ps. lxi. 9.) What is the meaning of this verse? *Zeal* signifies an ardent desire. Jesus was full of zeal, but on what account? For God's house. By "house" we understand not only the temple, but God's service, his people, his commandments, and all that belongs to him. A zeal for God's house means an ardent desire for his glory. Jesus had so strong a zeal that it ate him up, or consumed him. It is common to say, "Such a one is swallowed up of grief." It might be said of Jesus that he was swallowed up with a desire for God's honor. This was his chief desire, his ruling passion.

How different from this zeal is the desire that fills us by nature. By nature, we are eaten up with a zeal, not for God's house, but for our *own* pleasure, and honor, and interest. This is the reason that we take up so warmly any insult offered to *ourselves*, but are so indifferent respecting insults offered to God. If any person reproach us, or injure us, we turn in our minds how we can prevent his continuing to annoy us. We are uneasy and restless till we can defend ourselves. But how do we feel when we hear of God's commands being broken? Are we anxious to find out some way of stopping the evil? Do we feel as David did, when he said, "My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies keep not thy law;" or when he said, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law?" O that such a spirit dwelt in us! If we love God, we do feel *something* of this grief already. There are some among our magistrates and rulers who openly speak for God, and are ready to bear scorn and hatred for His sake; for all must be prepared for such treatment who endeavor to prevent the commission of sin. Faithful ministers, who oppose plays, fairs, and wakes, and other popular amusements, and who speak in the pulpit against sabbath-breaking, intemperance, and all ungodliness, are generally hated on that account. Even Jesus was hated, because he testified of the world that its works were evil. The reproaches of those that reproached God fell upon him. (Ps. lxi. 9.) May we hate evil as he did, though men should hate *us* also. If we sincerely hate sin, we shall hate it *most* in our *own* hearts, and ask God to cleanse them, and to render us vessels meet for the Master's use.

Evening Scripture portion. Ps. LXIX. *Zeal for God's house.*

JOHN II. 18 to end. *Christ speaks of the temple of his body.*

How could the Jews desire a *sign* of Christ's right to clear the temple of the traders? What could have enabled him to send out these profane men but the power of God? Was not that a sign of his au-

thority? Yet still the Jews, or the chief men of Jerusalem, desired a sign; but Christ refused to give them any, except that great sign of his own resurrection from the dead. This is God's constant way of dealing: he gives no sign to those who *wish* not to believe in him, and who only ask for a sign as an excuse for their unbelief.

What a remarkable name Jesus gave to his body!—He called it a temple. What is a temple?—the habitation of God. Christ's body was indeed a temple, for the Godhead dwelt in him. It is true, all real Christians form one great temple; for St. Paul says to them, "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them." (2 Cor. vi. 16.) But Christ was a temple in a still higher sense, for he and his Father were one.

When he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," neither his *friends* nor his *enemies* understood him. Yet these words were not forgotten; they were brought forward against him by his *enemies* when he was judged, and they were remembered by his *friends* after his rising again. No doubt there are many things in scripture which we do not yet understand. Let us look to Christ to teach us what we find to be dark and difficult. In the day of sorrow God often reveals the secret meaning of his words to his children. Some texts, in which we *now* see little beauty, may be our rod and staff when passing through the valley of the shadow of death.

There were some persons at Jerusalem, who, seeing the miracles that Jesus did, felt convinced that he was a true prophet, but they did not love him, nor desire his love. Now observe how Jesus behaved towards these persons. "He did not commit himself unto them;" (ver. 24;) that is, he did not place any confidence in them, but was on his guard when before them; he did not open to them his secrets, and tell them all the things that the Father had told him, as he did to his beloved disciples. (John xv. 15.) He treated his true disciples as "friends;" but these persons he knew still to be his *enemies*, for their hearts were not made new, and the natural heart of man is *enmity* against God. (Rom. viii. 7.)

It is a solemn thought that Jesus knows the hearts of all men. Men often deceive each other by false professions of piety, but they never can deceive him; he knows what is *in* them. It is said in the book of Revelation, that his eyes are like a flame of fire. When he writes to the Seven Churches by the hand of his disciple John, (Rev. ii. iii.,) he begins each letter with these words, "I know thy works." There is a beautiful history contained in a tract called *Jejana*, in which we are told of a little Hottentot maid, who, entering a church for the first time, heard the minister preach from these words, "I know thy works." In her ignorance, she thought the preacher himself was God, and tried to hide herself from his sight behind a pillar in the aisle where she was standing; for all the lies she had uttered and the thefts she had committed, rushed to her remembrance as the sentence was uttered, "I know thy works." But how light was the guilt of this heather

child, compared to that of a well-instructed person who is yet unconverted ! It is not only for having committed *such* sins as she had committed, that persons in a Christian land will be condemned at last, but for having refused to believe in the Son of God, with the *heart*. Christ knows the heart of every one of us ; he knows what is *in* us ; he knows whether we truly *love* him or not. If we do not *love* him, we do not believe in him in the *right manner*, and our faith can only be a *dead* faith, and such as will not save us.

Let each of us ask himself, "Do I *so* believe in Christ, that he might commit himself unto me, that he might consider me as a *friend* if he were upon earth ?" Can we say like the apostle Peter, "Lord, thou knowest *all* things ; thou knowest that I love thee ?"

Evening Scripture portion. Rev. II. 1-17. *Christ knows our works.*

JOHN III. 1-8.—*Christ's conversation with Nicodemus.*

WHAT can be so interesting as to hear how the Saviour instructed a person who desired to know the way of salvation ! What a privilege Nicodemus enjoyed when he talked alone with the Son of God ! What a privilege *we* enjoy when we read the account of this conversation !

Jesus could suit his conversation exactly to the case of Nicodemus, for he knew the state of his heart, and could tell with certainty what it would be the most profitable to say.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee ; one of that sect who placed their trust in the outward observance of the law, and who neglected to purify the *heart*. He was a *chief* person, a ruler and teacher. It was not surprising, therefore, that he was ashamed to come to Jesus openly. He came by night for *fear* of the Jews, as we are afterwards told in John xix. 39. Jesus did not refuse to receive him on that account, so compassionate is he to the infirmities of men ; but if Nicodemus had not conquered this base fear of man, he could not have become the disciple of Him who has said, "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven," (Matt. x. 33.) Nicodemus afterwards grew so bold, that when the name of Jesus was held in the greatest contempt he came forward with Joseph of Arimathea, and begged his body, that he might give it an honorable burial. But at the time we are reading of, he was still unconverted, and ignorant of his need of conversion ; he was, however, desirous of instruction, and did not shrink from a private interview with the Lord. He came to the light, even the light of the world, the Son of God.

He began the conversation by telling the Lord that he believed he was a teacher come from God, because of the miracles he did ; but it

does not seem that he knew him to be the Lord of glory. Jesus immediately spoke to him of the concerns of his soul. The words "Verily, verily," show that the truth he was going to disclose was very important: "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." How necessary it is for us well to consider the meaning of this declaration! Do we desire to see the kingdom of God? We must then desire to be born again.

What is it to be born again? Nicodemus did not understand the expression; he thought it related to the *body*, but it related to the soul. Our *souls* must be born again; that is, they must undergo a great change. As, when an infant is born, it undergoes a change, enters into a new world, has new desires, and joys, and sorrows; so when our hearts are born again, they have new desires, and joys, and sorrows. This doctrine has offended many persons, who, knowing that they themselves were not born again *in this manner*, have attempted to deny the true meaning of the words. Some have declared that all who have been baptized are born again; but this cannot be true, for we read in Acts viii., of a man called Simon, who was baptized by the apostles, but who yet was *not* born again; for Peter said to him, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; thy heart is not right in the sight of God."

Water is the *sign* of the cleansing effects of the Spirit. God has appointed the use of water in baptism, to remind us of the necessity of being purified by his Spirit. No *man* can bestow saving grace upon another; it is the work of God alone; the apostles could not change the *hearts* of men; Peter could not change the heart of the wicked Simon, to whom we have just referred.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." What is meant by the term "flesh?" Does it mean the body? It means not only the *body*, but also the soul. The soul as well as the body is called "flesh," in Scripture, because the unconverted *soul* loves *fleshly* things; it only delights in the earth—all its desires are after the things of the world, its pleasures, profits, and honors. But when the Spirit changes a man's fleshly heart, then he has a spiritual nature; then he has desires after spiritual things, after holiness and heaven. By this sign we must examine ourselves. Do we love the things of earth most, or the things of the Spirit? For it is declared in Rom. viii. 5, "They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

But perhaps you may ask, "*How* is this change effected?" How does the Holy Spirit enter into the soul? Can a person see him enter in? No; the change is wrought silently and secretly; for this reason the Spirit is compared to the wind which bloweth where it listeth; that is, which *seems* to blow where it likes, for man cannot control it, or even tell whence it comes. Thus, God sends his Spirit where *He will*, and we cannot tell how this holy Spirit changes the wicked heart

of man. We cannot see the wind, or understand its course ; yet we perceive the *effects* of the wind ; we can also behold the *effects* of the Spirit. Is it our great happiness to *feel* these effects in our own soul ? Those who have felt the refreshing breeze spring up in the evening of a sultry day, need no argument to convince them that the wind blows. How refreshing to the soul are the *effects* of the new birth ! Before a soul is born again, it pants for happiness, but pants in vain ; but when it knows that its sins are blotted out by the Saviour's blood, then it feels satisfied, and like a long-lost child just restored to a parent's arms, cries out, " Abba, Father."

Evening Scripture portion. Rom. VIII. 1-17. *The earthly and the spiritual mind.*

JOHN III. 9-21.—*The conversation concluded.*

NICODEMUS was very ignorant of the *meaning* of the Scriptures ; he knew the *words* familiarly, but not the *things* spoken of. He had no idea that a change of heart was necessary. He *ought* to have known it, because he had often read the words of the prophet Ezekiel, " A *new* heart also will I give you, and a *new* spirit will I put within you ; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh," (that is, a soft, tender, feeling heart,) Ezek. xxxvi. 26. Now this promise of a new heart, refers to the blessing of the new birth.

Nicodemus was a master, or a *teacher* in Israel, yet he knew not these things. Are there not many things which *we* ought to know, and which yet we know not ? We ought to seek to know the meaning of the Scriptures, inquiring of our minister or pious friends, reading books they recommend, and, above all, comparing one part with another, while we entreat the Lord to open the eyes of our understandings, to behold the wondrous things in his law.

Jesus did not explain the new birth to Nicodemus ; it could not be explained—it must be experienced to be understood ; but he told him that he ought to *believe* in it ; for he said, " We speak that we do know." By "*we*," He meant himself and the prophets, who all spoke of this new birth. How wrong it is in men not to believe heavenly messengers, especially the Son of God ! " Ye receive not *our witness*." May it never be said of us, that we do not receive the witness of the Lord and his apostles ! Nicodemus, however, was willing to be instructed, so Jesus continued to teach him, in spite of his ignorance and unbelief, for He is a *patient* teacher ; he will instruct the foolish and the slow of heart, if they will but listen to his words.

He began next to unfold the wonders of redeeming love. Nicodemus had often heard of the serpent of brass that Moses lifted up on a

pole in the wilderness, in order that the Israelites that had been bitten by fiery serpents, might look, and live. This brazen serpent he declared to be a type of himself. He then spoke to Nicodemus of his Father's love to man. O that these words might sink deep into *our* hearts. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." What a gracious declaration! What a free salvation! "*Who-soever*." No sinner is shut out, however horrible his sins; *every one* who believes shall receive pardon and everlasting life. What can be the reason that *all* men do not believe? This is the reason, "They love darkness," and why? "Because their deeds are evil." Every sinner's conscience bears witness to this truth. There are many who say they desire to be religious, who profess to lament that they cannot pray—that they cannot love God. Were they sincere in *what they said*, they would use the means of becoming religious; they would try to pray; they would read God's word, and seek the company of religious people. If one of you were to lose your precious sight, through an accident, you would not be satisfied by saying, "I wish my eyesight were restored; but I have no skill to restore it myself, and I cannot find my way to an oculist; I must therefore remain as I am." O no; you would prevail on some person to lead you to one who had already cured blind people, and then you would follow his directions, however irksome they might be.

Now if you desired to become truly religious, you would act in the same manner—you would use the means of grace—you would ask your pious friends to help you to find the way of life, and you would cry earnestly to God. What excuse shall we give to God at the last day, if we refuse to come to the light? Great will be our condemnation. Has God given us his only Son, and shall we refuse to come to him? Shall we remain unconcerned about him, and occupied with worldly trifles and cares, and then think to escape the just judgment of God? Whatever excuses we may make to ourselves now for such conduct, they will not be accepted at the day of account. The sin and folly of neglecting the way of salvation will then be openly seen, and all those who are condemned will have nothing to say in their own defence.

Evening Scripture portion. Numbers XXII. 1-9. *The brazen serpent.*

JOHN III. 22 to the end.—*John's testimony to Christ at Enon.*

How little did the Jews understand the character of John the Baptist! Some of them thought that he would be jealous of the Lord Jesus. How was that possible, when he came into the world to bear

witness to Him, and to persuade men to believe in Him? Some people came to John, complaining that Jesus baptized, and that all men came to him. John earnestly desired that all men should come to Christ; not come to him only to be baptized with *water*, but to be washed from their sins, and baptized with the Holy Ghost.

John's answer shows in the most beautiful manner the humility of his heart and the sincerity of his love to Christ. Though he had been much admired as a preacher, he was not lifted up with pride. He knew and declared that "a man can receive nothing, unless it be given him from above." O that we could always keep this truth in our minds! Then we should perceive the *folly* of pride, as well as its wretchedness. What have we that we have not received? Yet how apt we are to be puffed up, as though we had not received, and even to boast to others of our abilities, our possessions, our connections; of our numerous friends, and amiable qualities! We ought only to feel thankful to God for his gifts, and to humble ourselves in his sight, because we are unworthy of his notice; this is what the angels do who excel in strength, in wisdom, and in beauty. How awful it is when we feel proud of God's *spiritual* blessings! If he has put grace in our hearts, or enabled us to convert others, how unspeakably thankful we should be! To be proud of such mercies is, indeed, the blackest ingratitude.

John the Baptist was full of love to the Saviour; he compared him to a bridegroom, and himself to the bridegroom's friend. The bride is the church, Christ's believing people. It was John's desire to lead all men to love Christ. He had succeeded in persuading some to love him, and now he knew that Jesus was rejoicing over these believers. To hear the bridegroom's voice was his chief joy; he delighted in praising the bridegroom! he called himself *earthly*, but he declared Jesus to be *heavenly*, for he came from above. He himself had only received a *measure* of the Spirit; but Jesus had received the Spirit without measure, that is, in an infinite degree.

He then described the exceeding happiness of believers in Christ, and the miserable condition of unbelievers. These are John's words: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." It is *not* said, that he that believeth *shall* have everlasting life, but that he *hath* even *now* everlasting life. It is *not* said that he that believeth not, *shall* taste the wrath of God, but that *now* the wrath of God abideth on him. Every person is at this moment in one of these conditions; he either has everlasting life, or he is under the wrath of God. How *very happy*, or how *very miserable* every creature ought to be! Ought not that person to be miserable, who knows that at any moment he may be snatched away from the scene of his enjoyments? If we were to see a man living in splendor, in a magnificent house, surrounded by luxuries, and were told that he had immense debts, and that numerous creditors might at any moment thrust him into prison, should we count

him happy? He could not be happy, if he reflected upon his circumstances. Perhaps he would *not* reflect; perhaps he would run from one diversion to another, and thus endeavor to keep up his spirits. Now all unbelievers owe an immense debt to the justice of God, and they are in danger at any moment of being thrust into prison, even that prison of hell whence none ever escape. They would not enjoy a moment's peace if they reflected on their condition.

How different is the state of the believer! If you were to see a poor man, coarsely clothed and scantily fed, and if you were to be assured he was the heir of a large estate, you would expect him to bear his present hardships without murmuring. If *we* believe in the Son of God, we are the heirs of God; we *were* his debtors, but Christ paid our debt by his blood, and when we believed, we were free from it; and not only so, but we were made the heirs of a heavenly kingdom. Ought we not to rejoice exceedingly, and to reckon nothing of our present losses and disappointments, because of the great inheritance promised to us?

Evening Scripture portion.

Ps. LXXIII. *The wicked and the righteous.*

LUKE III. 19, 20.—*John's imprisonment.*

THE beautiful discourse that we lately read was the last discourse of John the Baptist that we find in the Scriptures. Soon after delivering it, he was cast into prison. It was Herod who imprisoned him. This Herod was the son of that Herod who slew the babes of Bethlehem, and he resembled his father in wickedness. As he was the governor of a fourth part of the land of Canaan, he is called a tetrarch, (which means the governor of the fourth part of a kingdom.) The Romans had made him governor of Judea. He had heard John preach. We are not informed whether he had gone into the wilderness to hear him, or whether he had sent for John into his palace; but we are told what *effect* John's preaching produced upon him. If we refer to St. Mark's gospel, we shall find an account of the sort of impression it made upon him. (Mark vi. 20.) "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy." Herod had a reverence for the character of John; though a wicked man, he respected John. This affords us a lesson. Perhaps we feel a respect for some holy men, yet this is not a proof that we are holy ourselves.

Herod did more than this: "He observed John." He took notice of what he said; he remembered it. Unconverted persons are often struck with the sermons they hear. But Herod did more still: "He did many things." He reformed many parts of his conduct. Perhaps

he showed more kindness to the poor, more attention to public worship, or more justice to his subjects. We are not informed *what* were the things which he altered; but we know that he altered not a *few*, but *many* things. Have *we* altered many things in our conduct, since we heard the gospel? It is well if we have: it is well if we read the Bible more; if we give away more; if we have left off openly breaking the Sabbath; or using profane language; or partaking of worldly amusements; but none of these things prove that we are converted.

But Herod did more still; "Herod heard John *gladly*." He took delight in his instructions. Was not that a good sign? It is a good sign if we take pleasure in listening to a faithful preacher, or to a pious friend, or in reading good books; but it is possible to do so, and yet to love sin; for though Herod heard sermons gladly, when John told him that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife, he was angry. Herod had committed a great crime: he had divorced his own wife, that he might marry Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; he could not bear to part from her. This was the sin he would not give up.

What a faithful preacher John was! though he knew that Herod had power to kill him, he feared not to tell him the truth. How difficult it is to act like John! A minister knows that he shall give offence to sinners, if he speaks to them plainly of their sins. As long as he speaks in *general* terms, he does not offend them; but as soon as he points out the peculiar sins of each class of persons, then he makes them enemies. When he reproves tradesmen for selling on the Sabbath, young people for frequenting places of worldly amusement, the poor for committing secret acts of dishonesty, the rich for living in pride and luxury, then he is hated for his interference. But how wicked it is to be angry with a faithful minister for pointing out our sins! If we do *not* turn from our favorite sins we shall perish. Herod would not pluck out his right eye, which was Herodias; he would not go with one eye to heaven, he preferred going with two to hell; he preferred his pleasure upon earth to everlasting joy.

See how one sin leads to another. Herod added this above all, that he shut up John in prison. Great as was the crime of marrying his brother's wife, the sin of shutting up John in prison was greater in God's eyes. And why was it greater? Because it was an insult committed directly against God; for God considers his *children* as himself. Whoever injures one of *them*, injures Him; for they are as dear to him as the apple of his eye. Besides, by shutting up John in prison, Herod hindered the preaching of the gospel; and thus he murdered men's souls. It is a dreadful sin to hinder the spread of the gospel. How much those will have to answer for, who have discouraged persons from *hearing* the gospel!

Herodias was more bitter against John than Herod himself, and would gladly have prevailed upon the monarch to kill him. But there were two reasons which prevented his committing this crime; the fear

of man, and his own conscience. We find in St. Matthew's gospel, xiv. 5, the following words: "And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet." The fear of man often prevents people following the commands of God, but it sometimes for a season hinders the wicked from doing bad actions. Herod's own conscience also made him unwilling to kill John, for the conscience of sinners restrains them as well as the fear of man. May we be kept from sin by better motives than those of Herod! The *love* of God in our hearts would make us *hate every sin*. Let us inquire whether there is any sin we refuse to part with. If we are not seeking to please God in *all* things, we cannot have confidence towards him: our own hearts condemn us, and "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." 1 John iii. 20.

Evening Scripture portion.

Ezek. XIV. *The stumbling-block of iniquity.*

JOHN IV. 1-15.—*Christ's conversation with the woman of Samaria.*

EVERY one must desire to know what our Saviour thought fit to say to a poor ignorant woman, whom he met beside a well. He was always watching for opportunities of doing good to the souls and bodies of men. Though He was weary, and doubtless hungry and thirsty also, he was intent upon his Father's business; while we are continually making excuses for not speaking to persons about their souls!

Observe how he begins the conversation: he asks the woman to give him some water to drink. She returns an uncivil, unfeeling reply: "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?" It was true that the Samaritans and Jews did live at enmity with each other; but this was very wicked, and our Saviour would not follow such wicked customs. However, he did not enter into a dispute on this subject, but passed on to one more important. In talking to people upon religion, we should keep the *chief* object in view, and not be induced to dispute on less important points.

How soft an answer did our Saviour return to the uncourteous woman! He saw her ignorance, and pitied her: he saw she was ruining her own soul by her refusal to have any dealings with him. How majestic and how touching is his reply! (v. 10.) "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, 'Give me to drink,' thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

The woman did not understand this answer; she did not know what the stranger meant by the "gift of God." She did not know that He himself was the gift of God, the Father, to a lost world; neither did

she know what he meant by "living water;" she thought he meant running water; she did not know that he spoke of the Holy Spirit. She began, indeed, to suspect that he was some great person, though he appeared a poor man; but she could not believe that he was greater than Jacob who had digged the well in old time. Neither could she imagine that any water could be better than the water of that well, and *that* water she was sure the stranger could not give to *her*, as he could not procure it for *himself*. But though she could allow the blessed Lord to remain parched with thirst, He was willing to supply her with the water of everlasting life.

He continued the conversation by pointing out a defect in the water of Jacob's well. "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." There is the same defect in *all* earthly pleasures and comforts; they seem to satisfy us for a little time, but soon the tormenting thirst returns. Have we not often experienced the truth of this? We have partaken of some pleasure, and have felt satisfied; but O how short was our satisfaction? We soon become restless and uneasy again. Thus we continue to thirst till we are made partakers of the Holy Ghost; then we feel satisfied. Then we find within ourselves a source of happiness. What is this source of never-failing delight? It is the sense of pardoned sin, of God's love in Christ, the hope of heaven, and of meeting our Redeemer there. Have you not heard of persons racked with pain, who yet enjoyed a peace that passeth all understanding? Perhaps you have seen such persons, and have wondered at their case. Behold the mystery explained; they drank, indeed, of no stream of earthly comforts, but there was in them a well of water springing up that never could be exhausted, and therefore they thirsted not after the muddy waters of this world.

The Samaritan woman did not understand the Saviour's meaning, yet she made the right request, for she said, "Give me of this water." O that we might all make this prayer, understanding for what it is we ask! God would certainly grant it. What! did God give his own Son to die for us, and shall He think any thing too *great* to give us? Who could have *thought* of such a gift? much less who could have dared to *ask* for it! that the Judge should give his only Son to die for the criminal! But as God has done this, and slain his beloved Son for us, is it not extreme ingratitude in us not to come to Him for the gifts the Saviour purchased with his blood! Jesus laid down his life to procure for us the Holy Spirit, the living water; and shall we neglect to ask for this precious gift? God forbid! Let each of us cry earnestly—constantly to God, "Give me this living water, O thou who hast so loved the world as to give thy only-begotten Son!"

Evening Scripture portion. Rev. XXII. *The water of life.*

JOHN IV. 16-24.—*The conversation continued.*

WHEN the Lord said, "Go call thy husband and come hither," the woman may have thought that he knew nothing about her circumstances; but his next words showed that he was acquainted with her whole history. Why then did he desire her to call her husband? He wished to bring her sins to her remembrance. It is probable that she had been divorced from these husbands, or had left them in a wicked manner. It was painful to her to be reminded of the sins of past years, and to be detected in pursuing even at that time an immoral course. But why did Jesus inflict this pain and this shame? That he might afterwards confer on this unhappy sinful woman everlasting glory and felicity. Let us not turn away from the remembrance of our sins. Every one must be brought low before he can be lifted up. We naturally shrink from being exposed even to ourselves; this is our folly and our sin.

The Samaritan woman (though now convinced that the stranger was a true prophet) did not like to dwell upon the circumstances of her history. She attempted to turn the conversation, and instead of inquiring how she might obtain forgiveness, referred to the chief points in dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews said that Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship God, and the Samaritans professed to worship him on a mountain in Samaria. Now Jerusalem was the place where God had commanded men to offer sacrifices; but he permitted them to pray to him everywhere. The Samaritans had done very wrong in building a temple on Mount Gerizim; their excuse was, that the Israelites in ancient times had pronounced blessings from this mountain, (as recorded in Deut. xxvi.) It was to this the woman referred when she said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain."

The Samaritans boasted of being descended from the Israelites, though they were chiefly of Assyrian origin. For when the king of Assyria took captive the last king of Israel and his people, he filled the land with Assyrians. At first these Assyrians worshipped idols, but afterwards they left off idolatry. Yet though they did not worship idols, they did not worship God. Jesus said to the woman, "Ye worship ye know not *what*." There are many in Christian countries who, like these Samaritans, do not worship the true God, though they think they do. God is a spirit. Do those believe that He is a spirit, who while they feel no love, nor reverence for his name, yet bend the knee and move the lip in seeming adoration? If we knew that an earthly sovereign could see into our hearts, and if we felt no love, no reverence for him, should we not be afraid of entering into his presence? Till we love God, we cannot worship him. What then is a sinner to do who is conscious that he does not love God? Let him confess his sins; let him ask for a new heart; let him think of God's love in giving his Son to die for a guilty world.

Though God is surrounded by millions of angels who worship him in spirit and in truth, yet He seeks for other worshippers. He is so condescending, that he delights in the praises of penitent sinners : He even seeketh such to worship him. Perhaps last night or this morning He saw you worshipping him alone in your chamber ; perhaps your voice was heard by no human creature, but your heart was full of sorrow for past sins, and of gratitude to God for having spared you so long. The Father of your spirit heard that prayer. He will answer it.

Evening Scripture portion. 2 Kings XVII. 24 to end. *Samaria.*

JOHN IV. 25-38.—*The spiritual harvest.*

THE ignorant Samaritan woman was much struck with the conversation of the stranger sitting by the well. It put her in mind of the promise she had heard of a Messiah, who should come into the world and instruct men. She seems at length to have desired instruction. She said, "When he is come, he will tell us all things." He *has* come already, and *has* told us all things. Are there not some here who love his words, and desire to keep them?

What a joyful moment that was when the Lord revealed himself unto the woman, and said, "I that talk unto thee am he." In her joy, it is probable, she did not remember that she had refused him a cup of cold water. She was now anxious that others should hear the heavenly stranger, and she ran with haste into the city. She told her countrymen *how* she had been convinced that Jesus was the Christ. She said, "Come see a man that told me all the things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?" Now one great proof that the Bible is the word of God, is, that it tells us all things that ever we did : not that it can tell *each* person his own life in particular, but it describes *such* men as we are, shows us the secrets of our hearts, and makes us feel that He who wrote it knew every thing concerning us. For this reason some hate the word ; they will not believe that their hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. This woman did not turn away from the Saviour's word because it exposed the sins of her life. Had she turned away, what infinite blessings she would have lost !

The disciples were astonished when they returned from the town with food, to find their Master talking in a friendly manner to a Samaritan woman. They thought that he was as prejudiced as themselves ; but He who has made of one blood all the nations upon earth, is no respecter of persons. There are white people in some countries at the present day, who treat the poor blacks with as much contempt as if they had not souls to be saved ; but these persons have not the mind of Christ : "He that despiseth his neighbor sinneth." When we

look down upon another on account of the circumstances of his birth, we sin against God.

The disciples showed both respect and affection for their Master in their conduct on this occasion. They had too much *respect* to ask him *why* he talked with the woman; and they had so much *affection*, that they could not bear to see him refuse the food they brought him. But Jesus was too intent upon the souls he was now going to save, to be able to eat. When we are going to enjoy a great delight, our appetite is taken away, and so it was with Jesus; his meat was to do his Father's will, and to finish his work. What was that will? What was that work? To seek and to save those which were lost; to glorify his Father by the salvation of sinners. John xvii. 4. O what love Christ had, to take delight in saving us, his enemies! Did *He* thus spend his life in willing labors for us, seeking no other pleasure than that of doing good; and shall we spend ours in doing *our own* will, and seeking *our own* glory?

Jesus directed his disciples' attention to the people who were thronging to hear him from the town. He compared their conversion to a harvest he was going to reap. Then he explained to his disciples that God often appointed one person to sow and another to reap. A minister who enters a place where the gospel has never been heard, may be compared to one who sows the good seed. Sometimes he is removed without seeing any fruit of his labor. Another follows him, and meets with great success in converting souls; and this last minister may be compared to a reaper. Thus it was in Greenland. When Hans Egede first visited that land of ice and snow, he met with neglect and scorn; and though he remained there fifteen years, he could not make an impression upon a single creature. Other missionaries from Germany followed in his steps, and they reaped an abundant harvest of souls; and Greenland is now a Christian country. Shall not Hans Egede who sowed the seed rejoice in heaven with the blessed men who reaped the sheaves? Jesus promised his apostles that they should reap many souls when they preached; his prophets had sown good seed long before, and had not reaped. Would God forget those poor persecuted prophets?

It is a great delight to be permitted to reap; but it is a great comfort to think, that if we only *sow*, and even shed tears because we meet with no success, yet that our labor is not in vain in the Lord; and that at the last day we shall doubtless come again, bringing our sheaves with us. There have been parents who have died fearing that their instructions had made no impression on the hearts of their children, and yet after their death some friend or minister has reaped those children's souls. Will not the parent rejoice with that friend when they all appear before God? He that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.

Evening Scripture portion. 1 Cor. III. *Ministers compared to husbandmen.*

JOHN IV. 39 to end.—*The conversion of the Samaritans, and the healing of the nobleman's son.*

SOME of the Samaritans were longer in believing than others. Some believed on account of the woman's testimony, others—not until they had heard him themselves. We know it is best to believe without hesitation, for Jesus once said, "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." You remember how readily Mary believed the angel's message; and Elizabeth said to her, "Blessed is she that believeth, for there shall be a performance of the things told her of the Lord." But though some of the Samaritans were *slow* in believing;—after they believed, they were *bold* in confessing their faith. They said, "We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the *world*." O what a title that is! The Saviour of the "*world*;" not of *Jews* only, but of SAMARITANS also, of some of every kindred and of every nation. May we all know him as *our* Saviour. We shall never truly love him till we know him, not only from report, but from experience. How different is the state of that person who only knows Jesus from what others have said of him, from *his* state who has received answers to his *own* prayers, and felt that his *own* sins are forgiven!

Jesus could not stay more than *two days* with these Samaritans! We perhaps have heard a thousand sermons, and have read the Bible through many times. Is it possible that any one among us does not love the Saviour? Would not these Samaritans rise up in judgment against one so much favored and yet so unfeeling!

Jesus did not return to Nazareth, which was his own country. There he was more despised than in any other place, because the people were accustomed to him. Though they had heard his blessed conversation year after year, and beheld his lovely example, they esteemed him not. It often happens that the gospel is most neglected where it has been longest preached. The excellent Baxter said, "I wish to be the minister of a place, either where the people have *heartily* embraced the gospel, or where they have *never* heard it; but I dread being the minister of a place where the people have heard in vain." Those who have heard without profit become hardened, and are more rarely converted than others.

We find in this chapter an instance of a nobleman coming to Jesus. Not *many* noble are called, yet *some* are called. This man was brought to Jesus by his afflictions. In his sorrowful circumstances this nobleman found himself as dependent upon God as a beggar. There was none but Jesus who could relieve his sorrow. The Lord did not favor him more than others, but treated him with the greatest plainness. Had this nobleman been proud, like Naaman, the Syrian, he might have gone away in anger; but he stood the trial of his faith. It was

to try him, Jesus said, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." The nobleman showed by his answer he believed already, for he replied, "Sir, come down ere my child die." Yet he had not *such* faith as the Centurion had, of whom we afterwards read; for this nobleman did not believe that Jesus could save his child unless he came down to the spot where he lay. But the Lord is compassionate to *weak faith*, when it is *real*. Jesus gave a greater proof of his power than the afflicted father had ever thought of: for he is able to do exceeding abundantly *above* all that we *ask* or *think*," (Eph. iii. 20.) "Go thy way," said the Lord, "thy son liveth." The nobleman's faith was grown so strong, that he believed the declaration. Nor was that faith disappointed: for, while returning home, he learned that his child had recovered at the very hour that Jesus spake the word. He now acquaints his family with this great display of the power and love of Jesus. What is the result? The whole family, wife, children, servants, believe. What a happy family they must have become! The master's journey was blessed to his whole household. It is the fervent wish of every master who loves God, to bring his whole household to the knowledge of him. May *this* family and *this* household be joined to the household of faith, and to the family in heaven and earth who are named after Jesus the Lord!

Evening Scripture portion. 1 Thess. II. *Converts to the Gospel.*

LUKE IV. 14-32.—*Christ preaches at Nazareth.*

THE people of Nazareth were much offended with the Lord for not visiting them *immediately* after his return from Jerusalem. They thought they had the best *right* to his presence. What a temper of mind was this! Had they any *right* to Jesus, because he had condescended to be brought up among them? What pride there was in the thought!

And what was their reason for desiring to have him among them? Were they thirsting for *spiritual* blessings, the forgiveness of sins, the renewal of the heart? No; the Nazarenes were only anxious to partake of *temporal* benefits; they wished Jesus to heal *their* sick, as he had healed the sick of other cities. When, at length, He came to Nazareth, he was invited to read. It was usual for seven persons in succession to read a portion of the Scriptures; one of them was a priest, another a Levite, but the other five might belong to any tribe. There was a minister of the synagogue, but his office was not like the office of ministers in our churches. It was his part to appoint which of the readers he pleased to read the lessons for the day. One of the lessons was taken from the law, and one from the prophets. The va-

rious books of the Scriptures were written on rolls of parchment. The roll containing the prophecy of Isaiah was presented to Jesus. The words he read were probably the lesson for the day, and they applied most forcibly to himself. Did the Nazarenes understand the meaning of the sublime passage which the Saviour read on that day? Perhaps some thought that Isaiah spoke of himself when he said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." But it was Jesus who really came to preach glad tidings, or "the gospel," to the poor in *spirit*. In that passage poor lost man is compared to a miserable prisoner, whose eyes had been put out, and who had been thrust into a dark dungeon. One of our Christian poets describes our condition by nature in the following stanza :—

"Plunged in a gulf of deep despair,
We wretched sinners lay,
Without one beam of cheerful hope,
Or spark of glimmering day."

Jesus came to deliver the poor blind captive, bruised, or galled by the chains of sin. He came to preach the "*acceptable year of the Lord*." There was a year of deliverance among the Jews: it occurred every fiftieth year, and was called the year of Jubilee. That year was a figure of Christ's great salvation from death and hell. Let each of us ask himself, "What do I know of this deliverance? Am I still tied and bound with the chain of my sins; or have I been set free from the power of Satan?"

The readers in the synagogue were permitted to explain the lesson they had read. Our Lord availed himself of this permission, and said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." For a moment the people were astonished at his words; but the next their *pride* rose. They remembered that he was considered to be the son of a carpenter, and they made this an excuse for despising him. It is *pride* which causes numbers to reject the word of salvation; they think to themselves, "Who is that man that I should listen to *him*? Why should he know more than I do?" Thus the Nazarenes reasoned. Jesus knew well that rage was working in their hearts: he knew that they were angry with him for having healed the sick of other cities before he had healed theirs; and he answered their thoughts by showing them that God had *always* chosen whom he *would*. Elijah in time of famine had sustained with oil and meal a widow of a *heathen* city; and Elisha had cured a leper of a *heathen* country, and not of his own. Jesus would not encourage those earthly-minded people to expect *any* benefits from him: while they rejected the *greatest*, he would not give them the *least*.

We see how hateful a worldly mind is to Jesus. If we are more anxious to possess an earthly portion than a heavenly inheritance, we are none of His. Yet you know well that the desire of the heart by nature is only for health, riches, pleasures, for worldly honor, or

domestic comforts. If Christ would bestow these on all who asked, what constant fervent prayers would be offered at his throne! The heathen imagine that their idols will bestow earthly blessings upon them, and that is one reason they pray to them so earnestly.

Behold with wonder the madness of the Nazarenes! They cast out the Saviour of the world, and forfeit their part in all his blessings! His Father preserved his life, for his hour was not yet come, and it has been well observed, "His children are all immortal till their work is done."

Can we behold without dismay such treatment of the Lord of heaven and earth? If *He* who was so lovely and so gracious was thus treated, ought not *we* to be prepared for similar usage? Had he been less *faithful*, the gentle Saviour might have avoided persecution; but he sought not to please *men*, but *God*; he desired not to get *honor*, but to save *souls*. We may often escape persecution by acting insincerely and unfaithfully. But what, if we should also lose our peace of mind, and the approbation of God!

Evening Scripture portion. Is. LXI. *The acceptable year.*

MATT. IV. 12-17.—*Christ takes up his abode at Capernaum.*

THE Lord Jesus chose to reside principally in the most *ignorant* part of Canaan; he selected the part at the *greatest* distance from Jerusalem, and which bordered on the wicked cities of Tyre and Sidon. And what led him to do this? Was it not pity for the ignorant and neglected? There are some who are now employed in visiting the courts and alleys of great cities, and some who are going into desolate villages, and some who are leaving their country to dwell among the heathen. Are they not walking in the steps of their Master?

Jesus fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah, by preaching in Zebulon and Naphtali. The words in the prophecy are difficult to understand, but learned men have offered a satisfactory explanation. Let us first read the prophecy in Isaiah ix. 1. Now let us read it with this alteration. Instead of reading "more grievously afflict," let us read, "made glorious." What is the sense of the passage? It is this: *Once* the tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali were *afflicted*, (because, being situated on the borders of Canaan, they were exposed to the invasions of the enemy,) but afterwards they were "made glorious." How? By the preaching of the Gospel. Yes, the Saviour by his presence and preaching bestowed glory on those sequestered spots. How great a blessing is the Gospel! it may well be compared to a

great light, for it sheds peace and joy around it. How melancholy is the condition of those who do not hear the Gospel! Well may they be said "to sit in darkness and the shadow of death." They do sit on the very brink of hell. We sometimes see a smiling village, seated on the side of a verdant hill, full of neat cottages and blooming gardens. We feel disposed to exclaim, "O! what a lovely spot!" But if the Gospel is not known there, it is, in the sight of God and of angels, a *dismal* place; while on the gloomiest, darkest alley, where Christ's word is heard, they look with joy.

In vain, however, the great light shone upon the people of Zebulon and Naphtali; for the light did not shine into their *hearts*. Christ afterwards pronounced a wo upon some of their cities, Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, because they repented not.

Let us take warning from this. If God do not shine into our *hearts*, in vain for us are the splendors of the noonday sun; in vain the clearest, most affecting preaching; even the preaching of Christ himself.

And about what did Jesus preach? Repentance. And why did he preach "repentance?" Because sorrow for sin and turning from it is the *beginning* of religion; but though it is the beginning, it must never cease upon earth. As Philip Henry said, "Repentance shall follow me to the gates of heaven." Rowland Hill also observed, that if he could regret any thing when he entered heaven, it would be that he should no more shed the penitential tear. There is no religion without repentance. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." May God bestow it upon each of us!

Evening Scripture portion. Is. IX. *The light that shone in Zebulon and Naphtali.*

MATT. IV. 18-22.—*Christ calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John.*

WAS it not a high honor to follow the Lord Jesus from place to place, to hear his word both in private and public, and to behold his works of power and love? *Whom* did he call to enjoy this honor? Poor ignorant fishermen; these became his intimate companions, his bosom friends, and his holy apostles. Thus, our glorious Lord stained the pride of all human glory; as he had done before, by lying in a manger, and as he did afterwards, by dying on a cross between two thieves. How ill pride befits *us*, when the Lord of glory was so lowly! Ought we to look down upon any one as beneath *our* notice, when the Son of God was so condescending? It is true that there are different stations in society, and some stations are counted high, and others low. It is well that this difference should exist; it is God's own wise appointment. But it is *not* his will that the rich should *despise* the poor;

no, he has made us all of one blood, and he has commanded us to love each other as brethren.

Jesus might have chosen *princes* for his companions, or even *angels*, and sent them out as ministers of his Gospel; but he preferred to prepare poor fishermen for the glorious work. Before he sent them out, he taught them for three years, and afterwards the Spirit caused them to know in a moment various languages. Education is *now* an important preparation for the work of the ministry, as the wonderful gifts the apostles enjoyed are no longer bestowed.

These men were employed in an industrious manner when Jesus called them. When God called Moses, he was keeping sheep; Gideon, he was thrashing; Elisha, he was guiding the plough. Industry in our common callings is pleasing in God's sight; a Christian should not be slothful in business. Yet these men were not so fond of their trade, or of their gains, as to prefer them to the service of Jesus. When he called, they left all and followed him. He did not bribe or entice them to come by promising them temporal rewards; he told them plainly that his design in calling them was to make them fishers of men. The net they would hereafter use would be the Word of God; the fish they would catch, the souls of men; and the reward they would obtain, a heavenly crown. They had often toiled in fishing, but they would toil more arduously in preaching; they would find men more hard to catch than fish, and the hatred of the world more terrible to bear than the winds and the waves. Christ has now many faithful fishermen, who, for his name's sake, are laboring to convert souls. Has their labor for *us* been in vain? Have we yet been caught in the Gospel net—willing captives? The poor fish, indeed, finds *death* in the net, but we find *life* in it. Well may the fish struggle and strive to escape; but it would be in us the height of folly; for the day in which a perishing sinner is caught in the heavenly net, is the *first* happy day of his existence; even the tears of the penitent are sweeter than the laughter of the world.

Evening Scripture portion. Judges VI. *The calling of Gideon.*

LUKE V. 1-11.—*The miraculous draught of fishes.*

As these disciples had toiled all night and had taken nothing, it is probable they were in distress for food when Jesus bid them launch into the deep. Was it only to supply their *temporal* wants that He caused them to enclose so large a multitude of fishes? No; for though he delighted in relieving their bodies, he delighted more in helping their *souls*. By this wonderful draught he taught them many great truths: he taught them something of the greatness of his power;

he taught them something of the blessedness of obedience. Peter had said, "At thy word I will let down the net." How richly was his *obedience* rewarded! The apostles were to become fishers of men. Who could enable them to catch men, that is, to convert souls? None but Jesus. Though ministers preach—till God pour down his Spirit, no souls are converted; yet ministers, like Peter, should be obedient, and continue patiently to let down the net of the Gospel. And should *ministers* only act thus? All Christians ought to exhort each other daily, and their common conversation should minister grace to the hearers. We ought to distribute tracts and Bibles, to teach children, to contribute our property to the support of missionaries, and to do whatever we can to benefit the souls of our fellow-creatures; yet our exertions will be vain, unless God add his blessing. Let us then entreat God to put forth his great power and to prosper the feeble efforts which we make in obedience to his command.

The remembrance of this miracle should encourage us; and still more the remembrance of the sermon Peter afterwards preached, recorded in Acts ii., when three thousand were converted. Probably there were not three thousand fishes in the net. Lately God has done wonders in America, and in India, and in the islands of the South Seas; thousands have been converted. We must pray for the outpouring of the Spirit, and then sinners will be awakened, and will cry out earnestly, "What shall we do to be saved?"

What do you think of Peter's prayer after the miracle? "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It was a good prayer, and yet it was a mistaken prayer. It was a good prayer, because it contained confession of sin. Peter was overwhelmed with a sense of his unworthiness; (that is the right spirit in which to make a prayer;) his heart was broken and contrite.

Perhaps he had indulged unbelieving, murmuring thoughts when toiling all night without success, and now he was overcome by the mercies of the Lord. This is true repentance—when we are grieved the more for our sins, on account of the Lord's goodness to us. Would not a person feel cut to the heart who had been suspecting another, and speaking against him; if suddenly he discovered that the man whom he counted an enemy had labored to serve him, and contrived schemes for his good. The discovery would fill him with compunction; he never could forgive himself for his ungenerous suspicions. Thus, "The goodness of God leadeth us to repentance." It leads us to feel our unworthiness and ingratitude.

But why did Peter desire so gracious a Lord to depart from him? *Jesus* knew the *spirit* in which he made this prayer, and he would not take him at his *word*. Though Peter said, "Depart from me," Jesus knew he sincerely loved him.

When the *wicked* say to God, "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways," He often takes them at their word; but He does not deal thus with the trembling penitent, but receives

him in his arms, and bids him abide with him forever. "Fear not," answers the blessed Saviour, "from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Instead of departing from Peter, the Lord never suffered Peter to depart from him.

Evening Scripture portion.

Acts II. 32d to the end. *Conversion of three thousand souls.*

MARK I. 21-28.—*Christ casts out a devil in the synagogue.*

THOUGH the Lord was continually working miracles, yet the miracle here related seems to have caused *unusual* wonder. And it might well do so, for in it Christ's power over the devil was displayed. One of the most mysterious subjects in the Bible is the manner in which devils possessed men in former times. It is *so* mysterious, that some have chosen not to believe it; but if we were to believe nothing that we could not clearly understand, how *little* we should believe! We should not believe in our own existence, for we cannot tell *how* we live, or what life is; yet we know that we do live. It is very reasonable to suppose, that when Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, that wicked spirit should make great efforts to resist him. Some have thought that the persons possessed with devils were in a state of madness; but we find that the mad or lunatic are mentioned by St. Matthew, separately from those possessed with devils; therefore madness is a different calamity from being possessed of devils. (Matt. iv. 24.)

It is true that Satan even *now* enters into men's hearts, to fill them with wickedness; but it was not in this way that he had entered into the man in the synagogue; for had this man been filled with Satan, as Judas afterwards was, Jesus would have spoken to him as to a wicked man; but He did not rebuke the *man*, He only rebuked the *devil*.

The evil spirit had permitted the man to go to the synagogue. Had he known whom he would meet there, surely he would not have suffered him to go; for he seemed full of fear when he saw Christ. He cried out, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us?" We know that devils believe and *tremble*. They cannot feel *hope*, but they can feel *fear*. They have no *hope* of growing happy, but they have a *fear* of becoming more miserable. Nor do they fear without cause; for their continual wickedness must render them more and more miserable throughout the ages of eternity, and must bring down upon them larger measures of God's wrath.

Even the praises of devils are abominable to Christ. When the evil spirit said, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God,"

Jesus replied, "Hold thy peace." He cannot bear the praises of those who hate him.

Let none think that while engaged in the service of Satan, the Lord accepts their praises. Though they may join in the responses at church, and say, "Thou art the king of glory, O Christ;" or repeat daily upon their knees, "Hallowed be thy name," yet while they are living in sin, their services are displeasing to God. He is ready to silence their tongues with "Hold thy peace." To the wicked, God saith, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind thee?" (Ps. l. 16, 17.) Such is the awful condition of the children of the devil—of the unconverted, even *now*. What will it be hereafter? Judge what it will be from the malice the devils displayed towards this poor man. When commanded to come out of him, the devil first tore him, and (as St. Luke informs us) "threw him in the midst." Though obliged to obey the Lord of all, with what reluctance he quitted his victim! He made him feel his malice before he left him.

It is to the malice of such devils that the wicked are to be forever given up. These are to be their companions through eternity; no Saviour's voice will penetrate the gates of hell to bid the raging fiends cease from tormenting. Let us consider the horrors of the future, and remember that these spirits *now* fill the air, and that Satan is called, "the prince of the power of the air." (Eph. ii. 2.) This prince seeks now to *deceive* the soul, in order that it may be cast into hell hereafter. There will be no escape for us, if not washed in the blood of Christ, and sanctified by his Spirit. What do we know of pardon and holiness? Have we obtained these precious gifts from Christ? He died that we might obtain them. Are there any of us, of whom it may be said, that "they are taken captive by the devil at his will?" Jesus can command the devil to let us go, and he *will* do so, if we implore his help. But the devil will not let go his captives, unless he is compelled; he diligently watches over them, lest they should believe and be saved, accompanies them to church and follows them home. Yes, he follows them *close*, for he has a numerous train of servants at his command. But there is a place where he cannot come; the shadow of the Almighty's wings. O enter into the secret place of the Most High, and there you shall be safe; for He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under foot. (Ps. xci.)

Evening Scripture portion.

Ps. L. *God's rejection of the services of the wicked.*

MARK I. 29-39.—*The scene at sunset and sunrise*

IT is our privilege to possess an account of the chief events of one whole day that our Saviour passed upon earth. It was a Sabbath-day. In what labors of love was that Sabbath spent! In the morning Jesus was at the synagogue, where he cast out a devil. After the service he returned to Simon Peter's house, which was in the city of Capernaum. There he healed Peter's wife's mother of a fever. How much tenderness there was in the manner in which the miracle was performed: "He took her by the hand and lifted her up." At his touch the fever fled, and strength returned. After a fever, a person is always exceedingly weak; but this woman arose, and waited upon her deliverer. How gladly must she have waited on him by whom she had been restored! Has Jesus done nothing for us? Has he never healed us when we were sick? Are we anxious to serve him?

When the sun was set, the Sabbath was ended; for the Jewish Sabbath began on Friday evening, and ended on Saturday evening. Then numbers flocked to Jesus, and he healed them all. This was a painful and laborious service. Could Jesus behold unmoved the diseased creatures that were brought to him? Could he hear the ravings of those possessed with devils, and the cries of those in pain, without anguish of spirit? Impossible; for his heart was full of compassion. Some persons turn away from the view of misery, because it gives them uneasiness; but such conduct is selfish. Our blessed Saviour felt far more at the sight of suffering than we can feel; yet he was willing to bear the pangs of sympathy. In this self-denying compassionate behavior, he fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows," (Is. lvi. 3;) or as St. Matthew expresses it, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."—(Matt. viii. 17.) He did this, not only by *partaking* of them, but by *relieving* them. He left us an example that we should follow his steps. We are not to give ourselves up to selfish enjoyment, while our fellow-creatures are groaning. No; we are to lay ourselves out for their good; to visit the sick, to give them food and medicine, and kind words of sympathy, and to be ready, if needful, to nurse them. Thus shall we follow Christ, who bare our sicknesses.

The Lord Jesus rested when his day of labor was over, but he rose a long while before the dawn to pray. He thirsted for communion with his Father. We always find time to do those things in which we much delight. Those who say they have no time to pray, show that they do not love to pray. A Christian finds prayer as necessary for his soul, as food for his body.

The Saviour's retirement was interrupted by his disciples, (and by the people of the city, as St. Luke tells us,) who said, "All men seek thee." Was this addressed to him who was despised and rejected of men? But how few of those who sought him truly loved him! Thus

it is now. Multitudes will flock to hear an earnest, interesting preacher; but only a few receive into their hearts the blessed Gospel he proclaims.

Jesus, however, could not stay in Capernaum; and he said, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for therefore came I forth." He ever remembered the *purpose* for which he came into the world: not his own pleasure, but the glory of God in the salvation of sinners. For what purpose were *we* sent into the world? Our own amusement? O no; yet many live as if they were born merely to live in pleasure, and then to die like the beasts. We were born that God might be glorified by us and in us. A young lady was once converted by meditating on the first answer in the Assembly's Catechism. The first question is, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer, "To glorify God, and enjoy him forever." She felt that she was not fulfilling this end while spending her time in vain and worldly pleasures. By the grace of God she gave them up, and became an eminent Christian.

Evening Scripture portion. Job XXIX. *Deeds of mercy.*

MATT. IV. 23-25. MARK I. 40-45.—*The cure of the leper and of multitudes with divers diseases and torments.*

How full of labors of love was our Saviour's life below! His *principal* object was to preach the Gospel, but he confirmed his word by various cures. These *bodily* cures represented the *spiritual* blessings he came to bestow. As he healed *all manner* of *diseases* without any exception, so he could forgive *all manner* of *sins*; for his blood cleanseth from all sin. No disease was too bad for him to cure, no devil too strong for him to cast out; neither was any sin, if repented of, too great for him to forgive. He declared, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men."

We cannot wonder that crowds followed Him, when He bestowed such abundant *temporal* benefits. We know how men value the health of the body. But Jesus was far more anxious to save the *souls* than to heal the *bodies* of men, and therefore he sought for opportunities to preach his holy word. Probably one reason for his charging the leper not to mention the means of his recovery was, that he foresaw that if the miracle were made known, a still greater throng of diseased persons would be collected, and that by this means his preaching would be interrupted. Disease of body must have appeared to him very light, compared to that disease of the soul which leads to destruction. We judge of diseases by their *end*, and not by their *beginning*. If we have seen a man die in torments from any disease, when we see the *be-*

ginning of that disease in another we are filled with horror. Jesus had seen souls tormented in burning flames, and he knew that *sin* was the beginning of hell.

Of all diseases none represents sin in a more striking manner than the leprosy. In the first place the leprosy was a *polluting* disease. It rendered a man unfit to enter the temple, or even to associate with his fellows; as by God's law any one who touched him became unclean. Thus sin unfits man from entering heaven, and for the society of spotless saints and angels.

The leprosy was also a *spreading* disorder. It covered a man with white scales from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot. Thus sin has defiled *all* our powers. It has disordered our affections, blinded our understandings, hardened our consciences, and perverted our wills.

The leprosy also was *incurable*. The hands and feet of the poor leper are often eaten away, and in this crippled state he drags out a miserable existence. But what disease is as painful as sin—the swellings of pride, the tumults of passion, the anxieties of covetousness, the gnawings of envy, the gloom of unbelief? Some have been induced to pray for a new heart, *not* from fear of the wrath to come, but on account of the *present* misery of their unconverted state.

The leprosy was also *incurable*. When the king of Syria in former times asked the king of Israel to cure Naaman his captain, the terrified monarch rent his clothes, saying, “Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man doth send unto me to cure a man of his leprosy?” (2 Kings v. 7.) Sin also is incurable by MAN. None can *forgive* sins but God alone; none can *overcome* sins but God alone. Tears cannot wash out our past sins, nor can good resolutions keep us from committing them in time to come.

Having then a leprosy in our souls, let us imitate the poor leper of whom we read. Behold him falling at the feet of Jesus, beseeching his help. Are our prayers earnest like his? or do we ask for eternal blessings with less earnestness than a beggar asks for an alms?

The leper's prayer is remarkable: “If thou *wilt* thou *canst* make me clean.” He doubted, *not* the *power* of Jesus, but his *mercy*. Yet his mercy is as great as his power. It is true that by his *power* he stretched out the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth. But it is also true that, “High as the heaven is above the earth, so great is his *mercy* towards them that fear him.” Had this leper known the compassion of the Saviour's heart, he would not have said, “If thou wilt!”

Observe how tenderly Jesus felt for him: “Moved with *compassion*, he put forth his hand and touched him.” He showed his condescension by touching the loathsome leper, from whom all others fled. Thus he encourages polluted sinners to approach him. He will not repel them, and say, “Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou;” He invites them to come near, and he offers by his holy touch to heal them. Fear not, penitent sinner; stay not till you are better; believe that Je-

sus will welcome you as you are. His blood is a fountain for sin and uncleanness ; he himself stands by to wash you in it. Come to him to be healed ; your cure shall be *perfect* ; *all* your sins shall be forgiven and cast into the depths of the sea, and you shall be restored to the favor of God, and admitted into the heavenly Jerusalem.

Evening Scripture portion. II. Kings V. *Naaman*.

LUKE V. 16-26.—*The paralytic let down through the house-top.*

THE Lord Jesus, being prevented for a time from entering the towns by the immense crowds that collected wherever he came, retired into the wilderness. How blessed was the use which he made of his retirement ! He gave himself unto prayer. And shall *we* venture to live without prayer—without much prayer—without fervent prayer ! How can we hope for any peace of mind without prayer to the God of peace ?

Soon, however, our Saviour came into the towns again. It was in Capernaum that he healed the man sick of the palsy. He was then preaching in a house, and many of the wise and great were present, watching maliciously his words and actions.

It was on this occasion that four men, bearing a poor paralytic, unable to get in at the door, ascended to the top of the house, (probably by some stairs outside,) and let down their sick friend through the roof. Great surprise must have been felt by the crowd below when the bed descended in the midst. Our Saviour was not annoyed by the interruption ; he was always ready to help the afflicted, and rejoiced at beholding any proof of faith in his power. In this instance he seems to have perceived some *spiritual* desire in the man ; for, instead of healing him immediately, he said, “Thy sins be forgiven thee ;” and, as St. Matthew relates, he said also, “*Son*, be of good cheer ;” as if he regarded him with especial tenderness, as a *son*, who mourned more for his sins than for his sufferings. This man was surely one of the broken-hearted ones that Jesus came to bind up.

But what do you think of the conduct of the friends of the paralytic ? If they had not been very anxious about the recovery of the sufferer, they would have retired when they saw the crowd around the door ; but they had set their hearts upon bringing him to Jesus, and they were ingenious in finding out a way. If we are as anxious to obtain spiritual blessings, as they were to benefit the sick man, we shall be ingenious too. We shall find time in almost any circumstances for prayer, and for reading the Scriptures. Some pious prisoners were once confined in a dark dungeon, and only had light allowed for a few minutes at meal-time. How could they read the Bible ? They used the light to read it, and they ate in the dark. What holy ingenuity

they displayed ! There are others who have used a like ingenuity in contriving means to bring sinners to Jesus. The last day will reveal how abundantly their pious plans have been blessed.

Jesus knew that his power to forgive sins was doubted by the enemies who surrounded him ; therefore he inquired which was easier, to forgive sins, or to heal the man. He knew which they *thought* the easier—to forgive sins. Mistaken idea ! It was *so* hard, that Jesus shed his blood, that he might procure this forgiveness. Little did his enemies know what it would cost him to be able to say, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.”

The pardon He bestows is valued only by those who groan beneath the burden of sin. The great reformer, Martin Luther, soon after he had become a monk, fell dangerously ill. Though he had long sought for pardon, he was filled with terror at the prospect of eternity. It was then that an aged monk visited his cell, and reminded him of those words in the creed, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.”—“Believe,” said the old man, “not only that the sins of David or Peter are forgiven, but that your *own* are pardoned.” These words were a balm to Luther’s wounded heart. He thought no more of gaining heaven by his own righteousness, but looked with confidence to the mercy of God in Christ.

Evening Scripture portion. Ps. XXXII. *Forgiveness of sins.*

JOHN V. 1-9.—*The miracle at the pool of Bethesda.*

CAN we hear of this pool without being reminded of that fountain for sin which Jesus has provided in his Gospel ? This pool was called Bethesda, which signifies “House of mercy.” And has not Jesus opened a house of mercy in his Word ? The poor sick people who sat near the water’s side represent diseased souls, such as we all have by nature ; only our souls are far *more* diseased than their bodies were : for some of them were blind, and others halt, and others withered, but our souls are diseased in all their powers. Neither had they all been afflicted *many* years. Even the man who had been thirty-eight years sick had not been sick from his *birth* : but our souls have been diseased by sin ever since we were *born*.

The pool of Bethesda is not an exact image of salvation : for only the *first* that stepped in it was cured. But what would become of sinners, if Christ’s salvation were thus straitened ? Blessed be God, the fountain of Christ’s blood is opened to *all* sinners unto the end of the world. How much selfishness must have been displayed at the borders of this pool ! how each man must have viewed his neighbor with an evil eye, fearing lest by another stepping in before him he

should himself be deprived of a cure ! How differently ought we to view our fellow-sinners ! *Their* salvation will not hinder *ours*.

Yet in one respect we ought to imitate the sick people around the pool,—in their *earnestness*. As they knew the *first* only would be cured, how patiently they watched around the pool, how eagerly they rushed in after the troubling of the water ! We ought to seek God as *earnestly* as if only *one* could obtain salvation ; then *not* one should fail to obtain it.

It appears that Jesus was not known by these sick people. Had they known the great Physician was so near, what a cry would have been raised from a multitude of suffering lips ! Jesus approached one of these pitiable objects. It was one who had been very long afflicted, who had been anxiously seeking a cure, and who had no friend to help him into the pool. Some person indeed had brought him to the edge of the pool ; but not one had watched by him to plunge him in at the critical moment.

Jesus knew his desolate condition, and the bitter disappointments he had suffered. He selected him as a fit object on whom to display his power and mercy. The poor paralytic was not accustomed to the voice of kindness. It must have refreshed his weary spirit to hear Jesus inquire, “Wilt thou be made whole ?” Immediately he began to pour out his complaints into the ear of the compassionate stranger, hoping perhaps that he should obtain his help the next time the water was troubled. But there was richer mercy in store for him, than any man or angel could bestow ; for by a *word*, Jesus restored him suddenly, and perfectly.

That Saviour knows the circumstances of all his creatures now scattered over the world ; and we know that he pities those who have no friends to teach them the way of salvation, especially when they themselves are concerned about their own souls. He may let them remain for a time in distress and perplexity ; but He will not let them perish in their ignorance.

Evening Scripture portion. Lev. XIII. *Fountain of sin.*

JOHN V. 10–16.—*Christ's interview with the restored paralytic.*

WE have in this history an instance of the bitter hatred of men to the truth. *Why* did the Jews accuse Jesus of having broken the Sabbath ? Was it because they revered that day ? By no means. We may judge of their respect for the Sabbath by their regard for the *temple* ; and we know that they made it a den of thieves, and filled it with sheep, and oxen, and money-changers. They did not care in

their hearts for the service of God. And had Jesus caused the paralytic to break the Sabbath? No; for though God had forbidden men to bear burdens on the Sabbath-days, He never intended that a sick man suddenly healed should not carry home his bed.

The reason the Jews objected to the action was, that they suspected *who* had cured the paralytic; and they were offended with the rebukes that Jesus had often given them in his sermons, and in his conversation. Holy men are generally watched in this way. Why have faithful preachers in later days been insulted? Because they interfere with the vices of men.

The restored cripple was unable to gratify the malice of the Jews, by informing them of the *name* of his deliverer. He knew it not. Must he not have longed to discover it? Soon Jesus afforded him the opportunity. He found him in the temple. We are glad to hear that the poor man went there. For thirty-eight years he had been *unable* to tread God's courts, and perhaps before that period he may have been *unwilling*; for, from the words of the Lord addressed to him, we have reason to fear he had been an ungodly youth.

This was the warning he received. "Behold thou art made whole, sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee." It appears that his affliction had been sent as a punishment for early sins. *All* afflictions are *not* sent as punishments. Those of Job were trials of his faith. But they are often sent to those who know not God, that they may remember their sins and turn from them.

It was a heavy chastening that the paralytic had endured—an illness of thirty-eight years. At length he was delivered. What, if he should return to sin! how many have acted thus!—After vows and tears they have risen from their sick beds, to requite their God with black ingratitude. What must be the consequence of such conduct?—a *worse* thing will come upon them. Is there *any thing worse* than a palsy of thirty-eight years' continuance? Let the lost spirits speak, who have spent but *one hour* in the flames of hell. How gladly would they exchange their place for the most suffering bed to be found on earth!

He who gave this warning was soon to taste the punishment of sin himself, and to know by experience that *worse* thing of which he spoke. In two or three short years Jesus would be extended on a cross, and nailed there for our sins, and would bear the weight of God's infinite wrath. By the blood he then shed, he is able to save us from eternal wo. But those who go on in sin shall taste something *worse* than any thing they have known on earth.

Are there any here who still love sin? Remember these words: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee." It is *Jesus* who utters them; *He* who has delivered sinners by his own *death*; *He*, even *He*, entreats them not to continue in sin.

Evening Scripture portion. Amos IV. *Warnings against sin.*

JOHN V. 17-30.—*Christ's defence of himself before the Sanhedrim.*

THIS is part of our Lord's defence of himself against the Jews. We know not in what *place* he made this defence. Some think he made it before the great council of seventy persons, called the Sanhedrim; and others think He made it in the temple. But all must allow that he made it *publicly* to the great and learned Jews, who were his deadly enemies, and who even then sought to kill him. They wanted to find an accusation against him, and the accusation they now made was that of Sabbath-breaking. The first sentence our Saviour uttered in his defence is difficult to understand.

Ver. 17. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

What works did his Father work? He had made the world in six days, and had then rested. He had rested from *creating*, but not from *preserving*. God preserveth man and beast continually. He is working in this manner on every side continually. Were he to cease from this work on the *Sabbath-day*, or on any other day, all creatures would sink into death; for it is God that preserves even the angels of heaven from death every moment. It is in Him we *live*, and move, and have our being. Jesus, in curing the paralytic, had done a work of this kind: he had renewed his life by imparting new strength to him. Thus the Jews were accusing him of *sin* for doing works which the Father was always doing, and which *he* also was always doing; for his Father and he were joined together in *every* work. Jesus, as well as the Father, had created the world, and he, as well as the Father, upheld all things by the word of his power; therefore he said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." And why are the Father and the Son always thus united in their works? Because they are one God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God.

The defence Jesus made of his work only brought fresh matter of accusation against him; because he had called God his Father, and thus had made himself equal with God. Now they not only accused him of breaking the Sabbath, but of the greater crime of blasphemy. And how did Jesus defend himself from the charge? Not by denying that He had said that He was equal with God, but by speaking of those great works which He would do, and which would show who He was. Those great works are to give life, and to execute judgment. Who could do such works but God himself! Even at the moment Jesus was speaking, He was able to give spiritual life to dead souls; for he said, (verse 25,) "The hour is coming, and *now is*, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." He has been doing this work ever since that hour. We do not see the dead souls arise, but Jesus does. He knows when he quickens a sinner who was dead in trespasses and sins. A time is approaching when his power will be publicly displayed as the Life, and as the Judge of the world, (verse 28.) "The hour is coming, in

the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth : they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

This is an awful declaration. It once awakened an aged sinner from the sleep of death. He went to the church where the Rev. Joseph Milner preached, and heard this passage given out as the text. He heard no more, for the words took possession of his mind, and filled him with anguish. He sought the Lord, obtained forgiveness, and became as eminent for holiness as he had before been for iniquity. God alone knows all the conquests of his own word. Verses of Scripture which are heard by many with indifference, have, through the power of the Holy Spirit, given life to souls now rejoicing in the presence of God.

Evening Scripture portion. Acts XII. 16 to end. *The Judgment day.*

JOHN V. 31-39.—*The defence continued.*

It is supposed that Jesus at this time was standing in the presence of the great council of the Jews, called the Sanhedrim. He had been accused of having healed the paralytic on the Sabbath-day ; and then of having made himself equal with God. Did he *deny* either charge ? By no means ; but he more fully declared his own glory as the Son of God. He brought forth his witnesses. His first, a great witness, was his Father who *sent* him. (See ver. 32.) "There is *another* that beareth witness of me."

Yet He condescended to appeal to a *human* witness also, even to John the Baptist. He said, "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth." You have not forgotten what is recorded in John i. 19-23. "The *Jews* (that is, the chief men) sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John, Who art thou ?" They came to him in the wilderness where he was preaching ; and he took that opportunity of bearing witness to Jesus. He said, "There standeth one among you whom ye know not ; he it is who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." (Ver. 26, 27.)

How could the Jews resist this testimony ? For a season they had rejoiced in his light ; that is, for a time they had admired his preaching ; yet they would not believe. John had now ceased to preach, for he was shut up in prison.

Jesus next described the different ways in which his Father witnessed to him. There were *three* ways : *First*, By enabling him to do miracles, such as healing the poor paralytic : those were "the

works which his Father had given him to finish," mentioned in verse 42.

Secondly, (see verse 37.) His Father *himself* had borne witness of him, by speaking from heaven at his baptism, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Such a voice had never been heard at ANY TIME before, witnessing for the old prophets, nor had *such* a display of glory been seen. It was the *excellent* glory, as St. Peter calls the brightness of the Father. (2 Peter i. 17.)

Thirdly, The Father had borne witness to his Son, in the Scriptures, that is, in the prophecies. Jesus bade the Jews search the Scriptures; saying, "They are they which testify of me." (See ver. 39.)

Had not the Jews of old sufficient proofs that Jesus was the Son of God? And we also have abundant evidence of this important truth.

We have not heard John the Baptist preach, *that* burning and shining light, but we have heard other preachers speak of Christ with devoted affection.

We have seen no miracles wrought, no blind eyes nor lame feet restored; but we have seen greater works than these. We have seen miracles done upon the SOUL. Have we never known a person, who lived a wicked life, changed by the power of the Gospel into a holy creature? Is it not far more wonderful to see a man's *mind* changed than his *body*? None can make such a change but God. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then can they who are accustomed to do evil learn to do good." Had we seen a black man changed into a white man, we should not have seen so great a wonder as if we had seen a child of the devil changed into a child of God.

We have another witness—the Old Testament Scripture. It is filled with prophecies concerning Christ. Have you read them? See how Isaiah declares, that he shall be brought like a lamb to the slaughter: how Zechariah says he shall ride on an ass, and be sold for thirty pieces of silver: how Micah foretells, he shall be born in Bethlehem; and how David in the Psalms predicts, that vinegar shall be given to him in his thirst, that his garments shall be parted, and his hands and feet pierced. The Jews, though they will not believe in Jesus, regard these prophecies as the word of God, and have kept them sacred for many ages. How can we disbelieve such proofs? And if Jesus be the Son of God indeed, and in truth, let us consider whether we are prepared to stand before his judgment-seat? Have we believed in him with our hearts?

Evening Scripture portion. Heb. I. *The Divinity of Christ.*

JOHN V. 40 to end.—*The defence concluded.*

THUS ended the Saviour's defence of himself before the chief Jews. These last verses we may call the *application* of the sermon. How forcibly could *He* speak to the conscience, who is himself like a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow! (Heb. iv.) He knew that those to whom he spoke *would* not come unto Him. "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." And He knew *why* they would not. It was because they had not the *love of God* in their hearts. He said, (ver. 42,) "I know you that ye have not the *love of God* in you." As Jesus was one with the Father, if men did not love God, they could not love *Him*. He was not such a Saviour as they liked; he cared not for the pomps and vanities of the world, and he did not promise them as rewards to his followers: therefore men did not desire him for their Saviour.

It is very important for us to consider this subject, because the same reasons cause men *now* to despise Christ. Why are they so careless about religion? Why do they treat the Bible as if it were not true? Is it because there is not proof enough? No; but because Jesus is too holy to suit the taste of sinners.

If we were to visit heathen countries we should find the people devoted to their idols: as the Scripture says, "*mad* upon their idols." (Jer. l. 38.) You have heard of the car of Juggernaut, in India. When it came forth, with what transports of joy it was viewed! Thousands travelled over sultry plains to attend it on its way; hundreds pressed forward to drag it along; some even threw themselves beneath its wheels, ready to be crushed in honor of the frightful idol that sat enthroned upon the ponderous machine. Why are people so fervent in the worship of idols? Because they imagine that these idols will indulge them in sin. The Roman Catholics show the same zeal in their religion of forms and ceremonies. They are ready to spend their money in decking images with flowers, and in illuminating the pictures of saints with candles. Men are willing to do any thing to please God, but to give up their sins.

And why is it that they have no taste for a holy and spiritual Saviour? Because they have a taste for the world. Why is it they do not love God? Because they love the world. Jesus pointed out this reason to his enemies. He said, "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another?" They cared for the opinion of their fellow-men; therefore they would not come to a despised Saviour.

But, O how *foolish* were they to prefer the honor that *mortal man* could give, above the honor that the *everlasting God* could bestow! What shame will overwhelm them at the last day, when even Moses, the prophet in whom they professed to trust, will disown them! Had

they believed his writings they would have believed the Saviour's words; for Moses had plainly declared, in Deuteronomy xviii., that God would raise up a prophet like himself to be the teacher of the Jews; and such a prophet was Christ. When they shall see the Lord appear in all his glory surrounded by his saints, and among them Moses and all the prophets, they will feel ashamed of their treatment of that blessed Saviour. Would *we* enjoy true honor hereafter, we must now faithfully cleave to His despised name, and to His despised people. We must not inquire, "What will the world think of me, if I follow this command of the Lord Jesus?" but we must only ask, "Will God approve my conduct?"

Evening Scripture portion. Deut. XVIII. *The prophet like unto Moses.*

MATT. XII. 1-8.—*Christ defends his disciples when falsely charged with the breach of the Sabbath.*

THE Pharisees were so much inflamed against Christ, that now he was in Jerusalem they sought eagerly to find some accusation against him, or his disciples. They particularly watched them on the Sabbath day; and now they thought they had caught them in a fault, because they observed them plucking ears of corn, and rubbing them in their hands, (as St. Luke informs us,) and eating, as they passed through some fields on their way to the synagogue.

It was particularly mentioned in the law of Moses, that men might pluck either corn or grapes as they went through fields or vineyards, and eat them while they were passing along, though they might not carry any away. Surely the Pharisees could not really have thought it was wrong in the disciples to satisfy their hunger; but there is nothing so foolish that malice will not say against the object of its hatred. What trifling and absurd accusations have been brought at all times against the people of God! It is a great trial to the followers of Christ to know that they are the subjects of criticism, and the butt of slander. Some are deterred from professing to be religious, by the fear that their conduct will then be canvassed, and that they shall be blamed even when innocent. But why should this prospect alarm them? The reproaches aimed at them are intended for their Master. Is it not an honor to share in His shame? O that our enemies could never find greater *cause* to blame *us* than the Pharisees had on this occasion to blame Christ's disciples! Then indeed should we shine forth as the sons of God, harmless and without rebuke. With what meekness the Lord Jesus defended his disciples! he returned no railing accusation, but he mildly argued

with his enemies. His example ought to lead us, when unjustly attacked, neither to give an angry retort, nor to preserve a sullen silence, but to endeavor, in a gentle spirit, to convince our opponents by forcible arguments.

These were the arguments Jesus offered. He said, "Have you not read what David did?" (1 Sam. xxi.) Have *we* not read what David did? He once was fleeing from Saul, and was overtaken with hunger at Nob, where the tabernacle was then placed. In the tabernacle there was a table, on which twelve loaves, called shewbread, were placed every Sabbath, and when removed, were eaten by the priests. Yet the priests gave David that *holy* bread, because they had no other to give him; and they were right in doing so; and even the Pharisees, when they had heard the history, had never blamed David for eating it. This was one of the Lord's arguments: if David might eat *holy bread* when he was hungry, might not the disciples pluck corn on a *holy day*, when they were hungry?

Another argument was this: the priests did much work on the Sabbath-day in the temple; they killed animals, and kindled fires, though the people in general were forbidden to do these works on the Sabbath-day; but the priests might do them when serving God in the temple. Jesus then declared himself to be greater than the *temple*; for not only God dwelt in his *body* as in a *temple*, but he *was God*: therefore his disciples might perform any works while waiting upon him. How this declaration must have exasperated and maddened the Pharisees! It teaches us, that on the Sabbath all works are lawful which are done in the service of Christ. We may use animals in *his* service, and to advance his kingdom. We may collect money for holy uses, or bestow it. We may write upon holy subjects, or distribute holy books. All these acts are like the services of the priests in the temple; they are done in honor of One greater than the temple.

But Jesus added one argument more: he quoted a verse from the prophet Hosea, well known to the Pharisees in the *letter*, but not in the *spirit*—"I will have *mercy*, and not sacrifice." God gave the Sabbath as a *mercy*, and *mercy* must never be forgotten on that day, in order to pay *sacrifice* or outward service. The hungry must be fed and the sick nursed. God does not wish any creature to *suffer* on that day. Whatever is necessary for *our* health, or for the health of others, may be done on that day. St. Mark relates, that Jesus added, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath was given by God to man for the benefit of his *soul* and *body*. Of course the soul is to be the *most* considered, because it is of the *most* worth. If any way of spending the Sabbath does good to our *bodies*, but hurts our *souls*, it is a *cruel* and not a *merciful* way. On the Monday morning we ought to observe whether we are more inclined to pray than before, for thus we may discover whether we have spent the Sabbath as its Lord would desire.

"The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath-day." Jesus showed that he was *Lord* of the Sabbath, by afterwards changing the day from Saturday the seventh day, to Sunday the first day, because then he rose from the dead. We ought therefore upon that day to think much of our risen Lord. How many tears were dried, when angels first declared, "He is risen!" The joy *then* felt shall never pass away. Every returning Sabbath bids us rejoice again. It was on the Lord's day that the apostle John once heard a voice saying, "I am he that liveth and was dead."

Evening Scripture portion. Hosea VI. *Mercy and not sacrifice.*

MATT. XII. 9-13.—*Christ heals the man with the withered hand.*

It was upon the way to the *synagogue* that the disciples had plucked the ears of corn; for our Saviour did honor to the ordinances of public worship by attending them himself. He *taught* at the synagogue, (as St. Mark relates;) he sat among the readers, and expounded. His enemies were present; for they observed the *forms* of religion, though they knew not its *power*.

Jesus noticed among the congregation a man with a withered hand. He would not be restrained by the malice of his enemies from displaying his mercy. The Pharisees observed what he was going to do, and asked him whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day. Jesus answered their question by another; for, in St. Mark's gospel, we find that He replied, "Is it lawful to do *good* on the Sabbath-days, or to do *evil*? To *save* life or to *kill*?" Thus he showed that he read the wicked hearts of his enemies, and perceived their design of killing him. It was impossible for them to resist this appeal to their consciences; they held their peace, as all the wicked shall do at the judgment-seat of Christ. "The mouths of them that speak lies shall be stopped;" (Ps. lxxiii. 11.) "The wicked shall be *silent* in darkness." (1 Sam. ii. 9.) Jesus regarded this poor man as a sheep fallen into a pit of affliction. He had looked upon all mankind as such a sheep, and had come down to redeem their precious souls from death. With what compassion he viewed his poor sheep, "plunged in a gulf of dark despair," whence it never could extricate itself?

St. Mark describes our Saviour's *feelings* towards his enemies on this occasion. "He looked round about him with anger, being *grieved* for the hardness of their hearts." Well might it grieve him to behold sinners endeavoring to hinder the healing of a poor sufferer, only because the Saviour's glory would shine forth the more brightly on that account? What an awful instance of hardness of heart! But are

there not some in these days who commit similar sins, by opposing the preaching of the Gospel, which can alone restore a withered *soul*? Does not Jesus view such persons *now* with anger and with grief?

The *manner* in which he healed the poor man is very remarkable. He *could* have cured him by a *word*; but he desired him to stretch forth his hand. Was not this a strange command? It was the man's disease, that he could not stretch forth his hand. The man might have replied, "I have often endeavored to stretch forth my hand, and have not been able. Why should I try again?" But he made no such unbelieving answer; he confided in the power of Jesus, and his attempt was successful. The Lord in his Gospel commands us to do things that seem to be *impossible*. He says, "Repent and believe." We are sinners, and *cannot* repent and believe, except by a miracle of grace. Our hearts are hard—how can they *repent* and feel *grieved* because we have sinned against God? Our minds are *blind*, how can we *believe* and see the glorious salvation of Christ? Let us beware of saying, "We cannot repent and believe: we have often tried, and we have not been able." There is an awful history of one who reasoned thus. It was Dr. Priestly. In his youth he discovered that he was not born again: at first he was greatly distressed at finding he *could not* repent and believe; but instead of looking to the power of Christ to enable him, he listened to the devil, who suggested that there was no such thing as repentance, faith, or regeneration. He believed the lie; he preached it; and how did he *die*? Comforting himself with the thought that there was no eternal punishment;—another lie suggested by Satan. He said to a friend, "Reach down that *book*—(he did not mean the Bible—he did not desire to hear its precious promises)—that book has greatly consoled me; it has convinced me that we shall *all* come to heaven *at last*, whatever sufferings we may endure first." Thus he died, expecting to be cast into hell for a *time*, and then to be translated to heaven. But who could bear the thoughts of passing *one day* in the lake of fire, or even *one hour*! Let us beware of the *first* unbelieving thought, lest it should increase to more ungodliness. Jesus commands, "Stretch forth thy hand: Repent—believe." If we have not repented or believed, let us make the effort now, confiding in his strength who gave the command.

Evening Scripture portion. 2 Thess. II. *Believing a lie.*

MATT. XII. 14–21.—*Isaiah's description of the gentle and compassionate Saviour.*

THOUGH Jesus had *silenced* his enemies in the synagogue, he had not overcome the enmity of their hearts. Though they could not *an-*

swer him, they could *hate* him. So great was their hatred, that when they left the synagogue, "they held a council against him how they might destroy him." Without the grace of God, public worship cannot benefit the soul. From the church where the Saviour has been present to bless many of the congregation, we may retire only "to do evil with both hands, earnestly."

Jesus retreated from his enemies to do good in another scene. He permits his followers to flee from persecution; but he enjoins them, wherever they go, still to seek to serve God.

Great multitudes followed Him into his retreat by the side of the lake, desiring to be healed of their diseases. Many people have wondered *why* he desired those whom he healed not to make him known. It appears that one reason was, that he did not wish, by the report of his miracles, to increase the rage of his enemies, and thus to provoke them to acts of violence before his work was done, and his hour was come. Another reason was, that he did not desire to add to the throng who followed him, and who pressed upon him to a painful degree. Already the concourse was so immense, that he was obliged to escape from the crowd into a ship. People flocked from the most distant parts of the land, and even from heathen cities. We find it recorded in Mark iii. 8, that they came from Idumea, or Edom, and from Tyre and Sidon, the habitations of idolatrous nations. Jesus did not desire the praise of multitudes; it gave him no pleasure to hear their shouts as he passed; he delighted in the petitions of the poor trembling sinner, and in the love of those whose sins he had forgiven. Was not his gentle, retiring, compassionate character truly described by the prophet Isaiah in the passage beginning, "Behold my Servant, whom I uphold?"

Now in this prophecy there are several deeply interesting points. A glimpse is here afforded of the everlasting covenant, that covenant which the Father made with the Son respecting our salvation. It was made before the world began; for God foresaw our ruin, and knew that none but his only-begotten Son could save us; therefore he appointed his Son to do this mighty work. The Son consented, and replied, "Lo, I come—I delight to do thy will, O God; yea, thy law is within my heart," (Ps. xl.) And lo, he *came*. Thus Christ became the *servant* of God his Father. He finished the work that his Father had given him to do, and then ascended to sit at his right hand as our Intercessor. He now pleads the merits of his service, and asks for his reward, the salvation of sinners. His Father has promised that he shall prevail. That is the meaning of the words, (v. 20,) "He shall send forth judgment unto *victory*." Yes—all the ends of the world shall remember themselves, and turn unto the Lord, (Ps. xxii.) That glorious day has not yet arrived. Meanwhile, let us trust in him. See what a gentle Saviour he is. "He will not break the *bruised* reed," or the broken heart. "He will not quench the smoking flax." The first desires of a soul after Christ may be compared to the smoke of

flax, after it has received a spark, and before it is kindled into a flame. Will he quench these feeble desires? No—he will fan them into a flame. How can we refuse to trust in so compassionate a Saviour! Ought we not to come to him with confidence, knowing that what he *was on earth*, he *is now in heaven*!

Evening Scripture portion. Isaiah XL. 11. *The gentleness of Christ.*

LUKE VI. 12–16.—*Christ chooses his twelve apostles.*

WE must remember, that though Jesus was God, yet that he was clothed in a body like our own, and was subject to all our feelings of fatigue. What ardor of love must have filled his bosom to have driven sleep from his eyelids, and to have sustained him in prayer for a *whole* night! How long do *we* pass in prayer? Half an hour? perhaps not five minutes morning and evening; perhaps the greater part even of that time our thoughts are wandering to the ends of the earth. Or do we *never* pray in spirit, with hearty desires after God? Do we feel our prayers a burdensome task; and do we *never* pour out our souls, as a child pours out his feelings into his father's bosom? If this be the case, how awful is our condition!

But even if we *do* know what it is to pray to God, yet we must feel that we do not pray as much, or as earnestly as we ought.

What blessings we should receive if we prayed to God more fervently, and entreated him and implored him to fulfil his promises! Why are we so apt to make excuses, and to think that we are too busy, or too much fatigued to pray! Is it because we do not believe that God hears us? or is it because we think that He will give us blessings without our asking for them? Let us beware lest we provoke God, by our negligence, to withdraw the blessings he has already bestowed.

We may conclude what was the subject of our Saviour's prayer that night, when we observe what was his employment the next morning. Then he chose twelve from among his disciples to be *apostles*. Was he not praying in the night for them, and for the success of their ministry? What blessings have been poured down upon thousands in answer to those midnight prayers!

But even *we*, unworthy as we are, might assist our Redeemer's cause by joining in his petitions; for he once said, "The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few; *pray* ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest."

Yes, even *we* may entreat God to choose holy men, and to make them his ministers. Human creatures may build churches, but they cannot place in them holy ministers, unless God prepare men for the ministry. And what is a church without a man of God in it! False

teachers ruin men's souls; *they* are not the ministers of Christ. Let us pray that God may send us pastors after his own heart to feed us with good knowledge, and understanding, and that he may send his shepherds forth to the ends of the earth to bring in his lost sheep into his fold.

These twelve apostles were not to become ministers *immediately*. If you refer to St. Mark iii. 14, you will find that Jesus ordained them that they should *first* be with him, and *then* go forth and preach. All who teach others must be *with* Jesus to be taught by him.

Who were the men whom Jesus chose to be his apostles or messengers? (for apostle means "person sent forth.")

Some were fishermen; Matthew was a publican; and probably none were great in this world.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were called Boanerges, or sons of thunder; and it is supposed that they afterwards preached with great power, for though John is famous for writing about love, he wrote *terrible* warnings to sinners, and no doubt uttered them also, even as Jesus his gentle master did.

There was *another* James, who had a brother called Judas or Jude. They were relations of the Lord Jesus, and they wrote the two epistles called by their names.

The last mentioned is Judas Iscariot, or the man of Carioth, the traitor! And why did Jesus choose such a man, when from the beginning he knew he would betray him, and once said, "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" *Why* then did he choose him? No doubt one reason was to fulfil the prophecy in Ps. xli.: "Mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." Might he not also have intended to teach us a solemn lesson by the example of Judas? It is possible to be with Jesus, to hear him night and day; it is possible to *appear* religious and to preach holy doctrines, and yet to perish everlastingly. There are too many instances of persons who have *appeared* to have been born of God, who have died in sin. Baxter relates that in his youthful days he had a friend who *seemed* more earnest than himself, who prayed with him and exhorted him, and who finally fell away, and made shipwreck of his faith. Can we hear of such instances without lifting up our hearts to God to keep us from falling?

Evening Scripture portion.

Jer. III. 12th to end. *Promise of good pastors.*

LUKE VI. 17-19.—*A multitude of persons healed by touching Christ.*

WE have lately read how Jesus spent a whole night in prayer, and in the morning chose his twelve apostles. After choosing them he

came down from the mountain, and found a vast multitude collected together in a plain beneath.

What a scene of *suffering* must have been witnessed upon this occasion, and what a scene of *joy* must have succeeded when the tongue of the dumb sang, and the lame man leaped as the hart, when mothers again beheld their drooping infants restored to all the freshness of health, when fathers rejoiced over children once tormented with devils, suddenly become gentle, reasonable, and happy? Yet these changes are but faint emblems of the glorious works which are now wrought where the gospel is preached in power: for virtue (that is, a *divine power*) still goes out of Jesus, and where his name is proclaimed, tongues that were dumb in his praise are loosed; feet that could not walk in his ways are strengthened; parents behold their wandering children returning to their forsaken God; and even angels in heaven survey the scene and look forward with joy to the time when redeemed sinners shall be their companions in heaven. O blessed gospel, which can effect such wonders! May it be preached all over the world, and rescue every sinner from the power of Satan!

There were probably some *spiritual* cures wrought by Jesus on that plain; for the multitude came not only to be healed, but also to *hear* him. This seemed a favorable opportunity for preaching a public discourse. This sermon is recorded by Saint Luke. It is doubtful whether that recorded by St. Matthew is the same as this, or whether it was delivered on a different occasion. But the two sermons are so much alike, that it will be best to select *one* only, and as St. Matthew gives the *fullest* account, we will consider the sermon recorded in his gospel.

Never could a congregation have had such motives to listen to a preacher as the audience that surrounded our Lord at this time. With what feelings of grateful love the newly-restored sufferers must have regarded their compassionate Saviour! And with what emotions of reverence and awe those who had witnessed the miracles must have gazed upon the Almighty Lord!

But much as we must admire the *power* displayed in his miracles, we must be chiefly touched by that *love* which induced him to welcome and relieve the suffering throng. The selfish heart of a fallen man would soon be wearied and disgusted with such a crowd of miserable objects. But the Son of God shrunk not from the leper's touch, nor the maniac's shriek.

The love of Jesus flowed out to meet the misery of man. It is thus even now. His love is still shown in listening to the cries of the most degraded outcasts. Those whom proud men would trample under foot, need only cry to the condescending Saviour, and they shall be heard, received, and welcomed. The beggar in his hovel is visited, even the felon in his cell, when, in the hour of trouble, he calls upon the name of Jesus. Could we track the steps of the Saviour through the world, we should find that while he passed by many a gay mansion

and many a grand palace, he often cheered by his presence the hut of the African slave, and softened by his love the hard bed of the dying pauper. How blessed are they who tread in the steps of the Saviour, and who delight more in relieving the sufferer than in shining in elegant society, and partaking of splendid entertainments! Every one has heard of Howard, the prisoner's friend; and of Wilberforce, the negro's friend; and of Ashley, the friend of the factory child: but there are many whose names the world has never heard, who have imitated Christ as nearly as they in labors of love. An aged outcast one night wandered to the door of a poor Christian. The wanderer was a beggar, and almost an idiot, but for Christ's sake she was received. Her new-found friend never grew weary of her charge, but year after year sustained her by the labor of her hands, dressing her wounds with a sister's tenderness, and praying with many tears for the salvation of her soul. When asked why she did so much for a stranger, she replied, "The love of Christ constraineth me. Has He not said, Bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?" (Is. lviii. 7.)

Evening Scripture portion. Ps. CVII. 1-22. *The mercy of God to the miserable.*

MATT. V. 1-10.—*Christ begins his sermon on the Mount by pronouncing the beatitudes.*

THE blessed Saviour had been just engaged in healing the *bodies* of men, when he ascended the mountain to preach words that might save their *souls*. He opened his mouth to speak with a loud voice to the vast multitude. What heavenly words proceeded from those gracious lips! He began with pronouncing blessings; for he came to bless and to save. These eight blessings are called the beatitudes. They are very instructive, because they teach us whom Christ counts happy or blessed.

We all naturally desire happiness, but we fall into this great mistake: we think that we must have earthly good in order to be happy. Do not the world show by their conduct, that if they were to speak the language of their hearts, they would say, "Blessed are those who have houses and lands: Blessed are those who enjoy health and long life: Blessed are those who are held in honor and reputation among men?" But God speaks very differently. He assures us that happiness is only to be found in his *presence*, and in *likeness* to himself. The Psalmist declares, "In thy presence is fulness of joy;" and again, "I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness." In order to become happy we must become holy like Him.

God will bestow upon us, in answer to our prayers, all the graces mentioned in these beatitudes—humility, penitence, meekness, spiritual desires, mercy, purity, love of peace-making, and joy in persecution. None but real Christians possess these dispositions. Unconverted persons may sometimes *appear* to be meek. It is no doubt true that there are some people more meek by nature than others. But how different is natural meekness from that of the true Christian! He is meek, *not* because he does not *feel* an insult, *not* because he is *afraid* of showing resentment, *not* because he sees it is most to his *interest* to endure in silence; but—because he traces the hand of God in every injury man is permitted to inflict, because he knows that he *deserves* worse treatment than he receives, and because his Saviour suffered far more for his sake. These are *some* of the motives which lie at the root of the Christian's meekness. When David was cursed by Shimei, he meekly replied, "Let him curse," because the Lord hath said unto him, "Curse David." He felt that the Lord had appointed the chastisement, and he did not desire to resist it. This was the meekness, not of nature, but of grace.

Some persons are more merciful or kind-hearted by nature than others; but none exercise true mercy except those who have themselves received it from God. These are the only persons who show mercy to the *souls* of men.

There are some also who naturally delight more than others in making peace; but the right motive must ever be wanting, where true religion is absent. How beautiful is the character of a Christian peacemaker! We might all do something in preventing quarrels, and in healing them. The children of Satan delight in seeing people divided, and often by their malicious tales create differences between friends: but the children of God delight in seeing hearts fondly attached to each other; and often by their kind efforts reunite the cord of love when it has been broken. Two celebrated ministers, Robert Hall and Charles Simeon, had quarrelled; they refused to speak to each other; when John Owen, another eminent minister, adopted the following plan to reconcile them, after several others had been tried in vain. He wrote and left at the house of each these lines:

How rare that task a prosperous issue finds,
Which seeks to reconcile discordant minds!
How many scruples rise at passion's touch!
This yields too little, and *that* asks too much;
Each wishes each with others' eyes to see:
And *many* sinners can't make *two* agree.
What mediation then, the Saviour show'd,
Who *singly* reconciled us *all* to God!

It is said that upon receiving the lines, each minister left his residence to seek the other, and that they met in the street, where a perfect reconciliation took place.

This is an instance of the manner in which the true Christian makes

peace between his brethren, and of the success with which God blesses his efforts.

Let us now turn to another of the beatitudes. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." All who know any thing of their own hearts, must acknowledge that they are not by nature pure. We learn from the scriptures that the heart is purified by *faith*. (Acts xv. 9.) When a man believes in Christ, his heart no longer delights in sin, but desires to be holy like God. Lest, however, any penitent sinner should be cast down by reading this verse, let me mention a little circumstance for his comfort:—

When the Esquimaux, in North America, first obtained the Gospel of St. Matthew in their own language, they perused the sacred treasure with the greatest attention. One day the missionary found a poor lad weeping bitterly. He inquired the cause of his grief. The youth replied by pointing to the passage in the eighth verse of this chapter. "Look there," said he, "it is only the pure in heart who shall see God; and I am not pure, so I can never see him." "But stop," said the missionary, (placing his finger on the fourth verse,) "read again, Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Evening Scripture portion.

2 Sam. XVI. 1–14. *David's meekness towards Shimei.*

MATT. V. 11–16.—*Christ prepares his disciples for persecution.*

THE sermon which the Lord Jesus preached on the Mount astonished those that heard it. Who would have thought that the persecuted could rejoice? Yet Jesus said, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you." There are a great many different kinds of persecution; but only one of them is mentioned in this place. It is a kind that some might think not very difficult to bear—the persecution of the *tongue*. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." But those who have endured this kind of persecution, know that it is very painful to the natural feelings. Yet all who follow Jesus must suffer it; for "if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" (Matt. x. 25.)

Slander is a part of the martyr's portion. No man was ever yet put to death as a *good* man. His enemies take away his good name before they venture to murder him. Thus they did to Jesus. They said that he was a rebel and a blasphemer, before they crucified him. The most dreadful calumnies were spread abroad respecting the early Christians. The first persecution was set on foot by the emperor Nero, on the ground that the Christians had set fire to the city of Rome,

though it is supposed he himself had committed the crime. When warriors expire on the field of battle, they know that their names will be honored by their countrymen; but martyrs often die amidst the curses and insults of the multitude.

Many Christians have tried to escape persecution by concealing their religion. But the Lord Jesus does not approve such conduct. He has compared his people to two things, salt and light. Why has he compared them to salt? Because if salt has lost its savor, it is *utterly useless*. Thus, a Christian who hides his religion, or who disgraces it by his conduct, is useless. Light also is a great blessing; but if it be concealed, it is no blessing at all. There have been Christians, in countries where persecution was violent, who have concealed their sentiments even from their own children. In Bohemia, some fathers, when going to die, acknowledged that all their lives they had been Protestants in heart, but had not had courage to avow it. While they lived, they often retired into a shed to read the Bible, which they buried in the earth. But did these men give *light* unto all that were in the house? Were their children brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

The prophet Daniel acted in a very different manner, when, in spite of the king's decree, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

There are two things which Christians must do if they would glorify God; they must lead holy lives, and openly acknowledge the Saviour, in whom they believe. If they do not openly acknowledge him, how can they do him honor by their *lives*? And if they do not lead holy lives, they disgrace the cause by making an open profession of his name.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." We must expect that they will *now* speak evil of us; but afterwards, when they are in *affliction*, they may be led to turn to our God; according to the words of the apostle Peter, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the *day of visitation*." (1 Peter ii. 12.)

Evening Scripture portion. Dan. VI. *Den of Lions.*

MATT. V. 17-32.—*Christ explains the spiritual nature of the law.*

It is a very common idea, that Christ came to set aside the law; but it is a mistaken one. He said himself, "I came not to destroy the

law, but to fulfil." He knew that man had broken it; and he came to fulfil it in his stead, and to bear the punishment due to man for breaking it. But he came to do still more; he came to take out of man's heart, his hatred of God's law. For ever since the fall, men have hated that law. As it is written, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God: neither indeed can be." (Rom. viii. 7.) The Pharisees professed to keep the law: but in their hearts they hated it.

No doubt it astonished the people exceedingly to hear Jesus declare, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." But what sort of righteousness can those men have had, who in their hearts hated righteousness! But this was the case with the Pharisees, and it is the case with every unconverted man. The law is too holy to please such sinful creatures as we are by nature. It may appear, at first sight, an easy thing to keep the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." But if we think it easy to keep it, it is because we do not understand its spiritual meaning. It forbids not only the *act* of murder, but the *thought*. Hatred is the beginning of murder. This may be proved. When we hate a person, we do not like the *presence* of that person; we feel uncomfortable when he is near, and wish he were at a distance. This must have been Cain's first feeling against Abel. It was fostered in his bosom, till it led to murder. Before he murdered Abel with his *hand*, he murdered him in *thought*. And what is the beginning of hatred? It is anger. There is a righteous anger. God is angry with the wicked; but if they would turn from their wickedness, his anger would cease; for he says, "Let the wicked man forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him." But sinful anger is very different from the anger of God; it is anger without a cause, or without a *sufficient* cause. Perhaps some one has slighted us and wounded our self-love; or, perhaps, he has gained some advantage that we should like to possess, and has excited our *envy*. Perhaps he has faithfully reproofed us, or set us an example which makes us feel ashamed of our own conduct. This was the reason that Cain was angry with Abel, and it was the reason that the Pharisees were angry with Jesus. Worldly people are still angry with real Christians on the same account. How sinful is such anger! It is usually vented in abusive words. Raca and fool were terms of reproach used by the Jews. Raca signified "vain worthless fellow," and fool, "wicked and abandoned wretch." And have none of us in our anger been led to use very improper expressions? Even little children sometimes utter very violent words in their fits of passion. And does not God notice these words? He does notice them, and though *we* may forget them, *He* will not. He is an adversary to the wicked, and will shut them up in a prison whence they can never escape. We are now going to pray to God

Do any of us cherish malice in our hearts? Malice is the worst kind of hatred. God will not accept the prayers or the praises of any person who hates his brother. It is a difficult thing to part with our sins. Many people would rather part with a foot, or an eye, than with their sins. But we *must* part with them, or we shall be cast into hell. Blessed be God, He will give new hearts to those who ask for them; He will make them righteous, and He will pardon all their sins for his dear Son's sake.

Evening Scripture portion.—Gen. IV. 1–16. *Cain and Abel.*

MATT. V. 33–37.—*Christ forbids irreverent swearing.*

THE Lord Jesus observes the expressions we use in our common conversation; he notices every reproachful word we utter to each other; he notices also every irreverent word we speak of God. He heard with displeasure the Jews of old calling their brethren *raca* and fool, and swearing by heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem, and by their own heads. Let us never forget that he still listens to our discourse, and is displeased with every profane expression, such as, “God bless us,” “The Lord knows,” “Upon my soul.” Ungodly people are so much in the habit of uttering these exclamations, that they scarcely know when they use them. But they could not have acquired the habit, if they had felt reverence for the majesty of the Almighty God. But when men became sinners, they began to despise Him. If they were to hear his terrible voice, they would be filled, as Adam was, with fear; but when they do not see him, they feel no dread, and care not how they insult his name.

But with what solemn awe the Son of God speaks of his Father! Even the heavens and earth are not common things in his sight. When we look up at the blue vault above our heads, we are gazing upon the throne of its Creator; and when we look around upon this green and smiling earth, we are gazing upon the footstool of its glorious Monarch: even our own heads are His, and not ours; for He made them, while we cannot make one hair, white or black. If men were not sinners, they would be satisfied with saying “yes” and “no,” without using oaths to confirm their words. For Jesus said, “But let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatever is more than these, cometh of *evil*,” “that is, from the evil *one*, or the evil *heart*.”

There is one difficulty that may be urged respecting the rule Christ laid down. How is it that St. Paul in his epistles often appeals to God, saying, “God is my witness, I speak the truth in

Christ; I lie not. I call God for a record upon my soul." Did Paul speak profanely? That is impossible, for he spake by the Holy Ghost. It is therefore lawful to appeal to God on solemn important occasions; as in a court of *justice*, when our words may affect the life of a fellow-creature. It is even mentioned in Isaiah as a proof of piety in future days, that men instead of swearing by false gods, will swear by the true God. "He that sweareth in the earth, shall swear by the God of truth." (Is. lxxv. 16.) In Deuteronomy also, God said, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and swear by his name." (vi. 13.) It must therefore be lawful on some occasions to use solemn oaths.

How condescending God has been to us in having used an oath to confirm his promise to us! Because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, and he said, "*As I live.*" This he did to quiet the unbelieving fears of his own people. He says to each of those who have fled to Christ for pardon, "Surely blessing I will bless thee." He adds his oath to his word, and says, "*As I live.*" Thus by *two* immutable or unchangeable things, his word and his oath, he gives strong consolation to the poor penitent trembling at his footstool. He uses the same oath when He threatens to destroy His enemies. "I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, 'I live forever.' If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold in judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me." (Deut. xxxii. 40, 41.) Well, then, may we fear this glorious and fearful name, "THE LORD THY GOD."

Evening Scripture portion.—Heb. VI. *The oath of God.*

MATT. V. 38-42.—*Christ enjoins long-suffering.*

THESE directions have excited a great deal of surprise. It seems to proud man impossible that God should expect him to bear injuries without complaint, or desire of revenge. Let us inquire in what manner these directions are to be understood. The words, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," are the words of God, and Jesus did not *contradict* his Father's words, which were his own also, but he *explained* them. The Pharisees had misunderstood them, and represented them falsely to the people. Those words, "eye for eye," were a direction given to the magistrates. See Ex. xxi. It was to be their rule of punishment. If a man put out another man's eye, the magistrate might not take away his *life* on that account, but might assign a punishment equal to the injury he had inflicted. But this command was never intended to encourage revenge. The magistrate executes justice for the *public* good, and men may bring others to justice on the

same account ; but they may not practise *private* revenge from feelings of hatred and anger. The Pharisees had explained this law very ill, and had deceived the people. Jesus told them that far from revenge being allowable, we are ought to suffer injuries without complaint, or resistance. He did not forbid us to remonstrate with our enemies, when we had the opportunity ; for it is right to do all we can to deter others from committing sin. He himself expostulated with the man who dared to smite his cheek, as he stood before the high priest, saying, "If I have spoken *evil*, bear witness of the evil ; but if *well*, why smitest thou me ?" (John xviii. 23.) When our Christian brethren trespass against us, we are bound to rebuke them, (though with mildness,) for it is written, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart ; thou shalt in any wise rebuke him, and not suffer sin upon him." (Lev. xix. 17.)

Are we not then to turn the left cheek to him that has smitten us on the right ? The command is to be obeyed in the *spirit*, rather than in the *letter*. And what is the *spirit* of the command ? It is a willingness to yield up our rights. We owe duties to others, and others owe duties to us. Now by nature we are apt to think *little* of the duties which we owe to others, and *much* of the duties they owe to us ; that is, we think little of our *duties*, and much of our *rights*. We are inclined to watch the conduct of others towards us, and to feel angry when they do not behave as we think they ought. This is a ruinous course of thought ; it not only makes us unhappy in *this* world, by leading us to feel dissatisfied and revengeful, but it endangers our happiness in the next, by taking off our thoughts from Christ, our atonement, and our example.

It is *useless* to think of the duties of others to us ; they ought not perhaps to expect so much from us, or to behave to us with such disrespect, or with such harshness ; but by dwelling on these subjects, we do not improve *their* conduct, but lose our *own* peace. On the contrary, it is most *useful* to think of the duties we owe to others, because we shall have to account for all our conduct at the last day. *Then* to have been ill-treated will be nothing, but to have ill-treated others will be dreadful. If we are engaged upon this profitable subject, we shall often not *observe* when our fellow-creatures behave ill to us, and thus we shall miss many occasions of uneasiness, and also of sin. But if we *do* observe any ingratitude, or unkindness, there is one great use we may make of the trial ; we may examine whether there is no person to whom we have behaved in a similar manner. It is almost certain that we shall remember having done something *like* the offence we have received, to some of our fellow-creatures ; but at all events, we shall find that there is *One* to whom we have behaved *far*, *far* more ungratefully than any have behaved to us. All that our fellow-creatures can do to us is but a faint shadow of the manner in which we have insulted God. What has He not a right to expect from us ! If a man had expended all his property in ransoming a poor

prisoner, would he not expect some grateful return for his generosity? But God has given up his only Son for our sakes. O sacrifice surpassing human thought! And how have we behaved towards him? How coldly! How unfaithfully! What reluctant obedience have we rendered! More frequently still, what open *disobedience*!

This consideration should make us very meek when we receive injuries. If it really sinks into our *hearts*, we shall become less ready to complain of others, and more earnest in our endeavors to behave well to them.

Evening Scripture portion. Deut. XIX. *Eye for eye.*

MATT. V. 43 to end.—*Christ enjoins the forgiveness of enemies.*

It is written in Lev. xix., “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The Pharisees for many ages past had given a very imperfect explanation of this law. They had not explained the term “neighbor” aright. They had declared that it applied to those who loved us, and did not include those who hated us. But this was not true. Every human creature is, in one sense, our neighbor. We are therefore commanded to love all. God had never said, “Thou shalt hate thine enemy;” for, though he had desired the Jews to form no friendships with heathen nations, he had never commanded them to hate or injure them from feelings of revenge. It was man who had added, “Thou shalt hate thine enemy.” How easy it was to obey such a law! By nature we love our friends, and hate our enemies. As Christ said, “Even the *publicans* love those that love them.” The publicans were people of very bad character, who generally defrauded in collecting the taxes, and who were therefore much despised: yet even *they* behaved with kindness and respect to their particular friends. The Pharisees had no reason to be proud of such righteousness as this. Well might our Saviour say to his disciples, “Except your righteousness shall *exceed* the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Yet this is the sort of righteousness which men are still inclined to think sufficient to entitle them to everlasting happiness. How often people say, “Have I not been a good mother to my children, a faithful friend, a kind brother—what harm have I done?” They claim a reward from God for such goodness as this! But our Saviour expects far more from his disciples; he expects them to love those who hate them; to speak kindly to them, in spite of their abusive words, and to pray for them, notwithstanding repeated injuries. And yet even this conduct deserves no reward, because it is no more than our duty.

Do we say, how is it possible for us to do this? It *is* impossible,

without a new heart. We are too *sinful* to do it. Those who have been renewed by grace are enabled to love their enemies. The missionaries who went to Greenland to dwell amidst plains of snow and mountains of ice, were treated in the most unfeeling manner by the natives. Once the ship that was to have brought them provisions did not arrive at the expected time, and they were reduced to the brink of famine; for they could not procure food by hunting seals, as the natives did. The cruel Greenlanders mocked at their sufferings, and refused to relieve them. At length the ship containing provisions arrived. The missionaries might have gone back in it to their native country, but they remained in Greenland. Soon afterwards, many of the people were in want of food, as through their improvidence their summer stores were exhausted. Did the missionaries refuse to feed them? They shared their little stock with them. The people were attacked with the smallpox; the missionaries nursed them with the greatest tenderness. This conduct had a great effect in softening the minds of the heathen towards their teachers, and in preparing them to receive their message. It is by such behavior we may show that we are the children of God.

How does God behave towards ungrateful man? Our Saviour reminded his disciples that God sent rain, and the light of day, to all, even to those who hated him. But he did not *then* speak of a still *greater* proof of love—the gift of his Son. For a *righteous* man some might even dare to die; but God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet *enemies*, we were reconciled to him by the death of his Son. This shows us what *kind* of love we ought to feel for our enemies. The *same kind* that God feels for us. *Not* the love of *approbation*, (that we can only feel for the righteous,) but the love of *compassion*. It is *this* love that God felt for the world when he gave his Son to die for it. To love an enemy is to be *perfect*; for it is to have charity, the bond of perfectness. If we have this charity, this love to all, we are like God, though our love can never be so great as His.

If we earnestly desire the salvation of our enemies, then we may know that we are the children of God. Let us endeavor to melt their hearts by acts of kindness. Such efforts are often blessed to the conversion of sinners. A holy man was once, for the truth's sake, shut up in a prison, and obliged to share the cell of a murderer. The conduct of his wicked companion was so intolerable, that his fellow-prisoner complained of him to those who overlooked the prison. An order was issued that the murderer should be removed to another dungeon. When the unhappy man heard to what place he was to be committed, his dismay was great, for he knew that the damp and closeness of that dungeon would cut short his life in a few days. He implored his fellow-prisoner, with many tears, to ask that the sentence might be reversed. The holy man felt that it was his duty to yield to these entreaties. He requested that the murderer might be permitted to re-

main with him. His petition was granted, but with this condition, that he should complain no more of the conduct of his companion. The murderer was melted by the generosity of the man he had once hated and annoyed. He fell at his feet, and with tears of gratitude implored his pardon. Henceforth he listened to his instructions, and through the grace of God, repented, and believed the Gospel.—(Related by the Rev. Cesar Malan.)

Evening Scripture portion. Lev. XIX. 1–18. *Love of our neighbor.*

MATT. VI. 1–4.—*Christ forbids ostentation in almsgiving.*

THE Lord Jesus now began to show the emptiness of the *good works* in which the Pharisees gloried. He had declared what false views they entertained of the *law of God*, and now he shows that their best actions were nothing worth, because they were done from wrong *motives*.

Let us remember that he said, in the early part of the sermon, that except our righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Here is an instance of what their righteousness was. They sometimes bestowed large sums of money on the poor, or on the service of the temple; but their desire was to be seen *of men*. They did not care so much for God's favor, as for men's admiration. Therefore they took care to have their charities *known*. They did not *literally* sound a trumpet before them; but they endeavored as much to attract notice, as if they had sounded a trumpet. They *did* gain much praise from men, and this was their reward, and their *only* reward.

We all by nature care for the praise of men more than for the praise of God. The reason is, that we have no faith. We see men, we hear their praise; but we do not see God, nor hear his voice. But when a person has faith, he begins to value God's favor more than the praise of men. To hear every human tongue united in applauding him, would not give him as much delight as the hope of hearing God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Now the point we should examine is this: Which are *we* most anxious to obtain, the praise of men or the favor of God?

It may sometimes be best that our charities should be *known*. David, for instance, gave the gold and silver he had saved for the temple in a *public* manner. But *why*? Not to gain praise, but to encourage others to give also. Should we even *hide* our charities, and at the same time *desire* that they should be discovered, God would not be pleased with us. He looks at the heart. He wants us to act to him alone. We ought not to think that our charities *deserve* to have a re-

ward from God. If we do them with this idea they will not be acceptable. What can *we* give to God? Nothing worthy of his acceptance. All we can bestow are but like the flowers that the cottager may gather from his garden, and present to the monarch as a slender token of his gratitude for the gift of his cottage, and for his garden, and for all that he possesses. A gracious sovereign would not refuse the gift, if *humbly* offered, though the flowers were common, and though his own garden contained the rarest and the finest; but if the cottager presented them to gain the praise of his neighbors, or thinking he conferred a great favor upon his king, both the offering and the offerer would deserve to be rejected. And shall those who give money for God's service in such a spirit, be accepted? Cornelius gave alms from the overflowings of a grateful heart, therefore the angel said to him, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up as a memorial before God," (Acts x. 4.) The poor widow gave her two mites with a single eye to God's glory. She gave her *heart* with them, or it would not have been said of her, "She gave more than they all." Mary poured the ointment on the head of Jesus, under a deep sense of her own unworthiness, and of the preciousness of her Saviour; therefore Jesus accepted the service, and has caused it to be remembered through all ages. All we do from a feeling of grateful love to *Him*, who laid down his life for us, shall be remembered by God, when the costly gifts of ostentation shall be buried in eternal forgetfulness.

Evening Scripture portion. 1 Chron. XXIX. 1-19. *David's gift to the Temple.*

MATT. VI. 5-8.—*Christ forbids ostentation in prayer.*

OUR Saviour continued to expose the emptiness of the works in which the Pharisees prided themselves. One of these was *almsgiving*. This has been *already* considered. Another was *prayer*. Let us now direct our attention to this subject. The customs of Judea were very different from ours. The synagogues were always open, and persons resorted to them, as well as to the temple, in order to pray. There was no harm in the custom, and many persons no doubt went to the synagogues to pray in sincerity, as we know one poor publican went to the temple, and sincerely said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." But others went only to be *seen of men*. There were also certain hours of the day at which the Pharisees said certain prayers; and if at these hours they found themselves in the streets, they stopped to repeat their task; and for this purpose preferred the corner of a street to a more private place. Jesus bade his disciples avoid such ostentatious conduct, and advised them to retire to their closets to pray, and to conceal from the world their communion with their heavenly Father.

If we really love God, we shall pray to him in *secret*. It is clear, that if we pray in church and in the family, but neglect *secret* prayer, we are only seeking human approbation.

It is a great proof, both of *faith* and *love*, to be frequent in secret prayer. If we were told that a departed friend was hovering near us, though unseen, and that he could hear us, though he could not answer us aloud, should we feel inclined to speak to him? This would depend upon two circumstances: *first*, upon our *faith* in the statement, that is, upon our really believing that the friend was near; and secondly, upon our *love* for this friend: If we both believed he was near, and loved him, we should find great delight in talking to him. "He that cometh to God, must believe that he *is*." If we doubt whether God hears us, no wonder we find prayer a burdensome task. If, also, we do not *love* God, how can we find it pleasant to speak to him? But if we believe that he is very near us, and if we love him with fond attachment, O how delightful to shut our closet door, and to pour out our hearts before him! And will he give us a *reward* for doing so? What! A reward to his needy creatures, for calling upon him for help! The reward will be, He will answer our petitions as He has promised, and at the last acknowledge us as His children.

Jesus also tells us in what *manner* we should pray. It is not words alone that move God. The heathen think they shall be heard for *much speaking*, and say, Baal, hear us, Baal, hear us. The Roman Catholics repeat the Lord's prayer many hundreds of times, and count the numbers upon their string of beads. But of what use are such prayers; for what are *words* without *desires*? We should *use words*, because in using them our desires grow stronger; but words without *desires* are but unmeaning noise. A Christian poet beautifully describes the nature of prayer in the following lines:

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Utter'd, or unexpress'd;
The hidden motion of a fire
That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear;
The upward glancing of an eye,
When none but God is near.

Sometimes the *mouth* cannot express what the *heart* feels. But sometimes the soul feels dead, and we cannot pray in spirit and in truth. An unconverted heart is always dead; but even the renewed heart has seasons of barrenness. How are desires to be stirred up? Take the Scriptures—consider the things revealed in them—Heaven, Hell, God, the Judge of all—the crucified Saviour—a precious soul—a fleeting life. Is there nothing you desire to escape? Nothing you desire to possess? Have you nothing to say to Him who can do every thing for you, and who has done so much already? What would

many a lost soul give for such an opportunity as you now possess? God, who sees your efforts, will send his Holy Spirit to teach you how to pray. Let us remember that prayer is our safety; without prayer we must be lost. When a person can receive no nourishment, we give him up; we know he must die if he can take nothing. If we cannot *pray*, we must perish.

Evening Scripture portion.
Gen. XXXII. 13 to end. *Jacob wrestling with the Angel.*

MATT. VI. 9-13.—*The Lord's Prayer.*

THIS prayer is so familiar to us, that we are in great danger of not considering its weighty meaning. A prayer taught by our blessed Saviour himself ought to engage our deepest attention. Had we been told that such a prayer had been given, and had never heard the words, how we should have desired to hear them!

We ought not to suppose that we are bound to use this prayer every time we pray. Jesus said, "After this *manner* pray ye." We find in this prayer a pattern for our prayers. We see in what way we should address God, and what kind of petitions we may present. The title we are allowed to give to Him is the tenderest that can be conceived—Our *Father*. He is our Father, because he made us in his own image; but by *sin*, we became children of the devil. How then are we restored to our Father? By Jesus Christ. He became our brother in the *flesh*, that we might become *his* brethren in the *spirit*. He makes us the children of God by faith in him. Thus he said to Mary Magdalene, after he rose from the dead, "Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and to *your* Father, and to my God, and to *your* God."

Our Father is a *king* also; but a dethroned king. His subjects have risen up in rebellion against him. Therefore his children entreat him to return. His return is the darling wish of their hearts. It is a great sign of faithfulness in subjects, when they maintain allegiance to a sovereign who is in banishment. At such a time it is dangerous to be faithful; for if discovered in sending letters to their monarch, inviting him to take possession of his throne, they would be regarded as enemies by their rebellious countrymen. Yet faithful subjects would be continually forming plans for the restoration of their lawful sovereign, and would run all risks rather than desert him. The children of God feel and act in this manner while they live in the world. Their desire is, that their Father's name should be hallowed, praised, and adored; that his kingdom should come, and that his will should be done on earth, as it is in heaven. In their prayers they express this desire *first*, and they en-

deavor to promote its fulfilment by persuading men to submit to their king. Nor shall their desires and efforts be disappointed, for God shall one day be king over all the earth. We see, therefore, that only converted persons can offer this prayer in sincerity, for none who are not converted long for God to be acknowledged as king.

The next requests relate to such things as we desire for *ourselves*. In the first place we ask for bread; not for a *great* supply, but *daily* bread. Then we ask for the forgiveness of sins, declaring at the same time that we have forgiven others their sins against us. Thus we see that this prayer suits none whose hearts cherish hatred and revenge; for if we do *not* forgive those who offend us, every time we use this prayer we are pronouncing our own condemnation, and asking God *not* to forgive us.

We have before remarked, that this prayer is only fit for those who love *God*, because they ask that his kingdom may come and his will be done. We now see that it is only fit for those who love *man* also; and we know that those who do love God, love their fellow-creatures also. These are the two great commandments—Love God and love thy neighbor. When people believe in Christ they have new hearts, and they begin to love God and man. Then this prayer suits them. They still have sins to be forgiven, and it is the sense of God's grace in forgiving them, that makes them so ready to forgive others. When God has forgiven them a debt of thousands of pounds, how can they exact a debt of a few pence from their fellows! They feel that no one has acted towards them as ungratefully as they have towards God, and so their mouths are stopped from uttering reproaches against their fellow-creatures.

A penitent sinner hates sin. He can say from the heart, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, (or the evil one.)" By nature we delight in temptation and in evil. All our pleasures are temptations; we are always running into it and longing for it. But the Christian dreads temptation; therefore he does not desire to be rich, nor to see much company, nor to obtain high praise, because he knows he might be tempted to be proud, and foolish, and to forget God.

The prayer is ended as it was begun—with the praise of God. Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. This is the consolation of the child of God; though none may acknowledge his Father, yet he knows his Father is glorious, and that some day his glory will be displayed before an assembled universe.

Christ would not have given his people such a prayer, if he had not determined to *grant* it. He knows what he will do, and he delights to hear us asking him to perform his gracious designs. Then let every devout soul say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory."

Evening Scripture portion. Rev. XI. *The kingdom of God.*

MATT. VI. 14, 15.—*Christ declares whom God will forgive.*

JESUS here gives some instructions concerning the frame of mind in which prayer must be made. In the Lord's prayer we are directed to say, "Forgive us our debts, or trespasses, as we forgive our debtors, or those who have sinned against us." This petition seems like asking God *not* to forgive us if we do *not* forgive others. Some people might have been induced to wish that some part of the sentence was omitted, and that they were instructed simply to ask God to forgive them, whether they forgave others or not. But it would be of no use to make such a prayer; for God is determined not to forgive us unless we do forgive others.

It is therefore necessary that we should inquire whether we do really forgive them; for our hearts are so deceitful that we are apt to imagine we forgive, when we still harbor a grudge against an offending brother. What then are the signs of having really forgiven an offender? When we have heartily forgiven him, we cease to indulge the *thought* of his offence, and we take no pleasure in *speaking* of it. When we have heartily forgiven him, we neither wish evil to befall him, nor feel glad if it do befall him; but, on the contrary, wish all manner of good to happen to him. When we have heartily forgiven him, we neither speak bitterly of him *ourselves*, nor do we feel gratified if we hear *others* speak harshly of him. This last, perhaps, is the best test of our state of feeling; for some who would not dare to speak harshly of an enemy themselves, would be glad to hear others do so. These should be our feelings even towards one who has *not* asked our forgiveness; but if our offending brother ask us to forgive him, we ought to restore him to friendship and endearment, and our heart ought to be towards him as before: and thus we ought to continue to act, in spite of *repeated* offences.

Is it an *easy thing* thus to forgive? No; it is *impossible* to nature, and can only be done through the Holy Spirit working in our hearts a sense of our own unworthiness, filling us with love to God for his mercy towards us, and then with love to our fellow-creatures.

Though thousands offer this prayer of our Lord every day, it is only accepted from those whose hearts are renewed by grace. Before our *prayers* are accepted, we *ourselves* must be accepted. Cain's *sacrifice* was not accepted by God, because he *himself* was not accepted. Abel's sacrifice was accepted, because he himself was accepted. Would we, therefore, offer acceptable prayers, we must first give our own selves to the Lord; we must come in the name of Jesus, and on account of his sacrifice that he offered on the cross, God will accept *us*, renew our hearts by his grace, and answer our prayers. God will not be mocked. Man would fain put God off with formal, heartless prayers; but He will not receive them. He spurns the offering, and says, "Who hath required this at *your*

hands—to tread my courts? When you spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea, when you make many prayers I will not hear.” (Is. i. 12–15.)

But let no penitent sinner be discouraged by these declarations. We may come with our sins to Christ, if they are a grief and a burden to us, for it is He alone who can *forgive* them, and it is He alone who can *subdue* them. His Holy Spirit will make us *hate* our sins, help us to strive against them, and enable us to overcome them.

Evening Scripture portion.—Is. I. 1–20. *The prayers of the wicked*

MATT. V. 16–18.—*Christ forbids ostentation in fasting.*

THERE was another duty upon the performance of which the Pharisees prided themselves—fasting. Some of them fasted twice a week. On those days they neglected the care of their persons, and went abroad that men might see they fasted, and admire them for their religion. In the day of a *public* fast for the sins of the *nation*, men should not conceal that they fast; but, like the king of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, they should set an example of penitence and self-denial. But when men fast for their *own* sins, then they ought to conceal the deed, and not seek to obtain human praise.

The scriptures teach us that fasting is a duty. It brings down the spirits, and sobers the mind; and, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, disposes the soul for prayer and meditation. But there are some persons so delicate, that their health would be injured by long fasting. It surely cannot be a duty for them to fast, for they would thus be less fit to pray.

But *all* should beware of excess in food, which drowns the soul, and renders it sensual and stupid. It is written concerning one of the most wicked cities of old, “Pride, FULNESS OF BREAD, and abundance of idleness was in her and her daughters,” (or inhabitants.) This fulness made them haughty, and brought on their destruction. (Ez. xvi. 48, 50.) Let none think that they are too pious to stand in need of such a warning. Christ warns his *own* disciples against surfeiting and drunkenness: “Take heed lest at any time your *hearts* be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness.” (Luke xxi. 34.) Constant moderation in meat and drink is as important to the soul as to the body.

But when we fast let us beware of *pride*; for as dead flies spoil the most fragrant ointment, so pride mars the most self-denying actions.

We should perform religious duties secretly, when we are among those who will think highly of us for observing them. This rule applies to fastings, prayer, reading the scripture, and doing good. But when we are among those who would ridicule us for religion, then is the time boldly to confess our Master, and to show that we are not ashamed of him. How *easy* it is to speak against vain amusements, to quote the scriptures, and to make pious remarks in the presence of religious people : but how difficult, when surrounded by scoffers, to be faithful to Christ ! We need a lively sense of the presence of God, that we may always act as in his sight, neither courting the smiles of our fellow-creatures, nor fearing their frowns ; neither seeking their *applause*, nor shrinking from their *ridicule*. Let us labor to be accepted of *Him*, to whom we must each give an account. In that solemn hour how worthless will the *praises* of our fellow-creatures appear, their *censures* how harmless !

Evening Scripture portion. Jonah III. IV. *Fasting.*

MATT. VI. 19-23.—*Christ forbids covetousness and double-mindedness.*

OUR Saviour had exposed the apparently *good* actions of the Pharisees, as their prayers, fastings, almsgivings. He now reproves their *wicked* practices. The first thing he attacks is their *covetousness*,—their delight in laying up earthly treasures. In those days riches consisted partly in valuable *clothes*, and therefore He speaks of moth and rust corrupting.

The Lord shows, in the first place, the *folly* of covetousness. Riches make themselves wings, and fly away. How *foolish*, then, to set the heart upon them ! But if we do not *lose* them, we must *leave* them. We brought nothing into this world, and we can carry nothing out ; it is therefore evident to *reason*, that if there is another world in which we shall *eternally* dwell, we ought to be extremely anxious to lay up treasures there.

But *how* are we to lay up treasures in heaven ? By good works. St. Paul, in his epistle to Timothy, says, “ Charge them that are rich in this world that they do good, that they be *rich* in *good works*, ready to distribute ; willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” But some may inquire, “ Can we gain heaven by good works ? ” O no. Jesus Christ has gained heaven by *his* righteousness, and he freely *bestows* this heaven on all who believe in him. We cannot lay up treasures there, till we have believed in Him.

We lay up treasures there, when we do things that please God. Good works are the fruits of faith. It is written, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." It is added, "Their works do follow them." (Rev. xiv. 13.) These blessed dead had believed in Christ; therefore their works were accepted. The Pharisees could not please God; they could not lay up treasures in heaven. And why not? Because the eyes of their minds were shut; and they saw not the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

How great is the darkness of the unawakened mind! God alone, by his Holy Spirit, can enlighten this darkness. Jesus came to give sight to the blind. Has he given it to us? Our actions show whether he has or not. When we see a blind person, we are not always aware at first that he is blind; but if we watch him closely we soon discover his condition. If a mad dog pass near him, he does not try to avoid it; and if the most splendid illuminations be displayed, he does not stop to admire. The *actions* of men show clearly whether they are blind or not. Unawakened souls evince no dread of hell, no desire after heaven, no contempt for earth, no love for Christ. God frowns, but they are not alarmed; He stretches out his arms, but they perceive it not; He opens the gate of heaven, they do not strive to enter it; He points to the abyss of hell, they do not shrink back; He lifts up his crucified Son, they are not softened, or subdued.

There is an eye to the mind: if that eye be shut, we can do nothing right. This is what our Lord meant when he declared, "The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, (or clear,) thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil, (or blind,) thy whole body shall be full of darkness." When the eye of the mind is made clear, then we begin to *act* aright, and not till then. Do we wish to know where *our* treasure is? Let us inquire where our heart is. They are in the same place. If our *affections* are set on things above, then we may know that we have *treasures* there; but if our *heart* is in our possessions, whether they be few or many, small or great, there our *treasure* is. Some unhappy creatures have shown in their last hours that their hearts were fixed upon some earthly trifles. A vain and foolish girl has been haunted in her expiring moments by the thoughts of her new dresses. A miser has been known eagerly to clench paper in his trembling hands, thinking it was his bank-notes. Had these dying persons possessed treasures in heaven, they would not have clung so closely to their perishing property on earth.

Evening Scripture portion. Prov. XXIII. *Riches have wings.*

MATT. VI. 24 to end.—*Christ forbids worldly carefulness.*

OUR Saviour had charged his disciples not to lay up treasures upon earth. In this passage He gives them another command that appears much more difficult to obey, that is, He forbids them to be anxious about needful food and raiment. We are naturally inclined to think it impossible *not* to be anxious about the means of our support; but God graciously offers many arguments to prevent our indulging in such cares.

Do we doubt God's *power* to provide for us? Who was it gave us *life*, and made our bodies? Is it not much easier to clothe, and to feed, than to create us? Do we doubt the *kindness* of the Lord? Does He not condescend to feed the ravens and clothe the lilies? and are *we* not much *better* than they, that is, much more precious in his sight than birds or flowers? Therefore we see that we dishonor God by doubting whether He will provide for our need.

It is also *useless* to be anxious about the future. By taking thought we cannot add one cubit to our height, nor one moment to our lives. We know from other parts of scripture, that God does not desire us to be idle or improvident: he only forbids useless tormenting fears about the future.

And why does He forbid such thoughts? Because there is a nobler object set before us, which requires *all* our thoughts—"The kingdom of God and his righteousness." This kingdom we must seek *earnestly*, or we shall not obtain it. If our thoughts are occupied about earthly things, we shall lose this earthly inheritance. Christ said, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," (or the world.) Neither can we be intent upon what we shall eat, and drink, and wear, and at the same time be seeking God. Christ said, that the Gentiles thought of these things. The Gentiles at that time were ignorant heathens, they knew not God, therefore they were occupied with earthly cares; but we ought not to be like them.

If we wish to discover our state before God, let us examine with what subjects our thoughts are generally occupied. Of course, while we are engaged upon any business, our minds must be on that business; but after it is done, our thoughts fly to the objects we most delight in. If we are God's children, our thoughts will often fly to heaven, our Father's house; but if we are not born again they will grovel upon the earth. This is God's own rule, "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit."

It may appear to us a trifling sin to be engrossed with earthly thoughts; but it is a sign that we are in the flesh, not born again of the Spirit. Now it is written, "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Rom. viii. 8.) How dreadful it would be to die in this state!

How kindly God undertakes to keep us from want, while we are seeking spiritual blessings with all our hearts! "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

How happy should we be even in this world, if we would obey this command! "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." It is much *pleasanter* to be thinking of heaven and Christ, than to be dwelling upon the evils of life; and O! how much *safer* is it! For though it is *useless* to take thought about *earthly* things, it is of the greatest *use* to take thought about *spiritual* things. By thinking of hell we shall be led to flee from it; by thinking of sin, to dread it; by thinking of righteousness, to implore God to bestow it upon us, even Christ's righteousness upon us His guilty creatures.

Evening Scripture portion.

Ps. CXLV. *The goodness of God to his creatures.*

MATT. VII. 1-6.—*Christ forbids hypocritical judgment.*

THE Lord Jesus had been warning his disciples against many of the evil practices of the Pharisees. There was no sin to which they were more addicted than to "judging." They did not judge righteous judgment, according to the word of God; but they judged according to their own wicked passions. Because they hated Christ, they endeavored to find faults in his conduct, and accused him of breaking the Sabbath, of encouraging sinners, and of being a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. The men of the world still walk in the steps of the Pharisees: they are continually looking with a malicious eye for faults in the children of God, and attributing wrong motives to all their actions.

We may be sure that such judgment is sinful, because it is passed in a spirit of *hatred*. In how different a spirit the Christian judges! He cannot but know that the world lieth in wickedness; he sees it with grief, and exerts all his powers to persuade sinners to flee from the wrath to come. By this rule we may know whether we are judging righteously or unrighteously. Do we *rejoice* over the faults of others, or do we *lament* over them! If we are seeking for their faults, and watching for their halting, then we have the spirit of the Pharisees, who maliciously watched the conduct of Christ and his disciples; then we may be sure that we are offending God, that we shall be judged by him, and that with the same measure we mete it will be measured to us; for "*he shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy.*" (James ii. 13.) It is in this spirit that irreligious people judge those whom they call "evangelicals and saints." They accuse

them of hypocrisy and of pride; they watch their conduct with an eagle's eye, and triumph over their infirmities with a demon's joy. Such persons have a beam in their own eye. This beam prevents them from seeing their *own* sins. We may be assured, that if we do not see *ourselves* to be very great and miserable sinners, there is a beam of unbelief in our eyes which prevents our seeing it. While we cannot see our *own* sins, we cannot see the sins of *others* aright. What *we* call sins in them, perhaps are *not* sins. We do not know how to reprove till we have discovered what sinners *we ourselves* are.

But when God, by his converting grace, takes the beam out of our eyes, then we may help our brother to overcome *his* sins. Then we shall warn him in a spirit of humility and love, feeling our own unworthiness, and anxious for his good.

But there are some characters, in dealing with whom great caution must be used. Hypocrites may be compared to dogs and swine. As these animals feed on carrion and the vilest refuse, so hypocrites delight in sin. It would be wrong to give holy food, such as the priests ate, to dogs; and it would be foolish to cast pearls, such as queens wear, to swine.

But is it wrong or foolish to declare the holy and precious word of God to wicked men? O no—for Jesus said to his apostles, “Preach the gospel to every creature.” But when men, having heard the truth, trample it under foot by their blasphemies, and turn and rend by their revilings those who speak it, then they must be left to themselves. In this manner the apostle Paul dealt with the wicked Jews of Corinth. “And when they opposed themselves and blasphemed, he shook his raiment.” “Your blood be upon your own heads: I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles!” (Acts xviii. 6.) Thus the apostle left the dogs and swine, that he might feed the sheep committed to his charge.

Evening Scripture portion. Acts XVIII. *Enemies of the truth.*

MATT. VII. 7-11.—*Christ promises that prayer shall be answered.*

THIS is one of the most encouraging passages in the whole Scriptures. How many have been led by this invitation to approach the throne of grace! Here is not only an *invitation* which assures you of a welcome, but also a *promise* of success—your petition shall be granted, “for *every one* that asketh receiveth.”

Christ knew how apt we are to doubt the love of our Heavenly Father. Therefore he appealed to all the parents present, and said, “What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread will he give him a stone?” Every parent who heard this question must have felt

that he could not treat his child in so unfeeling a manner : much less would he give his child a serpent instead of a fish, or a scorpion instead of an egg. There are in the East white scorpions, about the size of an egg ; but no parent would deceive and mock his child by giving him that venomous animal instead of wholesome food.

There are few who cannot recollect the kindness their parents showed to them in their helpless days. There are few who have no recollection of a father's or a mother's love. In childhood we knew not its value, but in later years it melts our hearts to think of it. How readily our dear parents listened to our requests ! They were not always able to grant them, and sometimes they saw it would not be well to give us what we desired. But they never denied us food when we needed it. They would rather have gone without it themselves, than have seen us suffering from hunger. How carefully they guarded us from every thing that would injure us ! They warned us not to approach too near the fire, or the water, and not to touch poisonous berries or venomous reptiles. Far from giving us a scorpion, they would have been terrified, if they had seen it in our hands. And does God feel the same tenderness for his children ? Hear what Jesus says who came forth from the bosom of the Father : " If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how *much more* shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him ?"

But if any trembling soul should reply, " How can I be sure that He is *my* Father ? He is not the Father of the wicked," let him know that none but the children of God ask him for *good* things. The little lamb is shown to belong to its own mother by running to her to be fed. The children of Satan do not desire to have those things which God has promised. They seek for an earthly portion. They never *really* pray. When they are miserable, they often complain, but these complaints are not prayers. God said of Israel, " They have not cried unto me with their hearts, when they howled upon their beds," (Hos. vii. 14.) Sometimes in distress they make vows, as well as complaints. But are their vows prayers ? God calls them flatteries, and lies. " Nevertheless they did but flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues, for their heart was not right with him," (Ps. lxxviii. 36.) How different from these were the prayers of David ! He could say to God, " I entreated thy favor with my whole heart." And he could also say, " Blessed be the Lord because He hath heard the voice of my supplications." Every one who is now earnestly seeking God shall sooner or later say the same. Therefore, " let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord," (Ps. cv. 3.)

Evening Scripture portion. Prov. II. *Earnestness in seeking the Lord.*

MATT. VII. 12-14.—*Christ describes the wrong and the right way.*

Who can hear our Saviour's golden rule without approving it ! And who can hear it without condemning himself ! "Whatsoever things ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them." He who has kept the same is a perfect man, and has done all the law and prophets taught. We must confess with sorrow that we have broken it a thousand times, and that we need pardon through the Saviour's blood for these manifold transgressions. But though we have transgressed, yet if we desire to please God, we shall find this rule an admirable guide. God knows our ignorance, and has graciously furnished us with a rule that will apply to all circumstances in which we can be placed. On every occasion we should imagine ourselves to be in the place of our neighbor, and say, (for instance,) "If I were a parent, how should I expect my child to behave towards me ; if I were a child, my parent ; if I were a master, how should I require my servant to conduct himself ; if I were a servant, how should I wish my master to deal with me ; if I were suffering pain, what should I desire the healthy to do to alleviate my misery ; if I were sunk in poverty, what should I think the rich ought to do, when they beheld my destitution ?" We may go further still, and say, "If I were a perishing heathen, now standing before the bar of God, what should I then think Christians ought to have done for me ?" We must, however, ask these questions with *this* condition—"What would it be *reasonable* for me to expect another to do for me, if I were in his circumstances ?"

How ill can we bear to be examined by this rule ! And yet we have behaved *far, far better* to our *fellow-creatures* than we have to *God*.

Our Saviour, by his next declaration, has often excited astonishment and anxiety. He declared that the gate of life was strait, and that the way was narrow ; by which he meant that men find it difficult to be truly religious. The narrow way is not broader *now* than it was when these words were first spoken, and *still* there are but few who find it. And if there are but *few* who find it, let us never conclude that any practice is right, because *many* indulge in it. The way in which *many* walk must be wrong. If we would please God and save our souls, we must be singular.

In the broad way there are many *travellers*, and there are many *paths* in which those travellers walk. People of all sorts of character walk in it ; the intemperate, and the miser ; the pleasure-lover, and the self-righteous ; and each different kind of character condemns the other. Yet they are all alike in this respect, they do not love God, nor do his will ; and they are *all* hastening (however little they may think it) to the *same* destruction.

Christians, on the contrary, all walk in the same path. They are

all alike in spirit, though some are more excellent than others. They enter in at the same strait gate, that is, they believe in the same Saviour. Though they come from the opposite ends of the world, yet they know each other's minds, and sympathize with each other's feelings. The greatest king and the meanest beggar have a sympathy with each other, if they both love Christ.

Yet this narrow way is little sought. The reason is, men cannot bear the sacrifices which they must make before they can enter in. They do not like to give up their pleasure and their pride. If they would walk in this narrow way, they would find it pleasant. In some places it is steep, and in others it is rough; but the *prospect* makes it pleasant. It is a prospect that would make any path pleasant. It is a prospect that grows brighter as the traveller proceeds; it is the prospect of the everlasting hills, crowned with the golden city and the pearly gates. And the *Companion* makes it pleasant. He is at once the guard, the guide, the friend of all who walk in the narrow way.

And though but *few* walk in it *now*, yet in the home to which it leads a multitude shall be found, yes, a multitude without number; for in *every* age, there have been *some* who travelled in this path, and in the ages yet to come there shall be many more. The broad road shall not be always thronged. When Satan, who now deceives the world, shall be shut up in prison, then the broad way shall be forsaken, the people shall be *all* righteous, and none shall say any more to his neighbor, "Know the Lord," for *all* shall "know Him from the greatest to the least." Our journey may be lonely, but our Father's house shall not be *empty*. There are *many* mansions in it, and not one of them shall want a blessed inhabitant. Then will our divine Lord be satisfied, when he beholds gathered around Him his innumerable family.

And shall the straitness of the gate deter us from seeking to enter in? Or shall the narrowness of the way induce us to turn back? It would be well to go through fire and water to attain such an inheritance. But the *sufferings* of this way are far less than its *consolations*, and these cannot be *compared* with its *end*. "I reckon," said the apostle Paul, "that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," (Rom. viii. 18.)

Evening Scripture portion. Isa. LX. *Multitudes of believers in the last days.*

MATT. VII. 15-20.—*Christ warns against false prophets.*

OUR Saviour had been showing his disciples the necessity of walking in the narrow way to heaven. He knew that many false teachers

would arise, who would point out an easier way; and the Pharisees at that very time encouraged people, by their instructions and example, to walk in the broad road which leadeth to destruction.

There have been false teachers in all ages. There were some among the Jews of old. Jeremiah and Ezekiel warned the people against prophets, who said, "Peace, peace, when there was no peace," and "healed the wound of the daughter of God's people slightly," and "daubed the wall with untempered mortar." (Ez. xiii.) By these comparisons we are taught that the false prophets encouraged people to remain in sin. False ministers do so now; they do not teach the necessity of a living faith, and of an entire change of heart; therefore their hearers are not led to wash in the fountain of Christ's blood, or to pray that they may be truly converted.

It is quite necessary to warn people against such teachers; for many listen to their words, and follow their pernicious ways. These ministers are compared to wolves, because they destroy the souls of God's people. They are described as wearing sheep's clothing, because they often speak in a religious tone, and use Scripture language. When Lord Cobham was tried in London, in the year 1413, these hypocritical sentences were written by the Papists in his bills of condemnation: "Following Christ's example in all that we might, who willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he be converted and live, we took upon us to correct him. . . . Pitying him of fatherly compassion, and entirely desiring the health of his soul, we appointed him a competent time of deliberation. Christ we take unto witness, that nothing else we seek in this our whole enterprise but his glory."

This language was sheep's clothing. Those who used it were inwardly ravening wolves. They sought to kill a pious nobleman, because he would not believe the errors which they taught. At last they obtained their heart's desire; for Lord Cobham was sentenced by the English parliament to be hung in chains and roasted over a slow fire.

Christ has told us *how* we are to detect false teachers when disguised in a fleece—by their fruits. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. These heavenly qualities adorn every faithful minister, though in some they flourish more than in others. Love reigns in the heart of every true Christian, and shines forth in his actions. He may be known by his kindness to *all* the saints, by his patient behavior to his enemies, and by his unwearied efforts to save the souls of men. None but a converted person brings forth such fruits as these. There are many unconverted persons who lead moral, respectable, and even benevolent lives, but their hearts do not overflow with this *love* that we have described; and as their apparently good actions do not proceed from the right motive, they are worthless in the sight of Him who searches the hearts. None but a good tree can bring forth good fruit.

We are all bad trees by nature ; but God can make us good trees by his Spirit.

How awful is the declaration—"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire." Should not this terrible sentence lead us all anxiously to inquire, "Have I received a new nature? Have I become a good tree? Has the heavenly Husbandman found good fruit growing upon my branches?" The loving, the tender Saviour would not have alarmed us, had there been no cause for alarm.

Evening Scripture portion. Ezek. XIII. *False prophets.*

MATT. VII. 21-23.—*He predicts the rejection of the false professor.*

In this passage, Jesus gave a solemn warning to his own disciples, to those who professed to believe in him, and to those who called him "Lord, Lord." At the beginning of this sermon, he had declared, that except their righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they could not be saved. He had shown that the righteousness of the Pharisees was a mere outward form of religion, and he had warned his own followers against being satisfied with a mere form also. He declared that *many* would be lost through this sad mistake. "Many will say unto *me* in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" and I will profess unto them, "I never knew you." In these words Jesus revealed *himself* as the Judge of men—even as the Son of God.

Now let us hear what our Judge says. He declares that none shall enter heaven, but those who do the will of his Father. Does this make us tremble? Surely we must feel (if we know ourselves at all) that we often sin. But, "doing the Father's will," does not mean *never* being overtaken by a fault; for Christ declared to his Father in his last prayer for his disciples before his crucifixion, (John xvii.,) that *they* "*had kept his word.*" Yet we know that they had often fallen into sin, such as disputing which should be the greatest, desiring to resent injuries, and sending away poor suppliants. But what is it to do the will of God? It is sincerely to seek to please him from LOVE to his name. None do this but those who have received the *Spirit of God*, those who are born again. Jesus did not explain this subject *fully* in *this* sermon; but he said enough to show that we must seek for grace from God in order to be saved. Did he not say, "Seek first the kingdom of God and *his righteousness*?" and also, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it

shall be opened unto you?" If we would do the will of God, we must seek for new hearts.

There is a passage in the epistles, which shows clearly that nothing short of the power of God working in our hearts can enable us to perform any action acceptable in his sight. (Heb. xiii. 20, 21.) "Now the God of peace which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, (that great Shepherd of the sheep,) through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work *to do his will, working in you* that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen." These verses show us that the power of that God who raised Christ from the dead, must work in our hearts to enable us to do his will. Neither can we do it, but through faith in Christ's *blood*, which was shed for us according to his everlasting promise or covenant.

Do we dread the idea of meeting with a repulse at the last day? Now is the time to examine whether we have been born again; whether the blood of Christ has washed away our sins; whether the Spirit has been shed abroad in our hearts; and whether we are doing the will of God. It is possible to depart out of this world, imagining we are going to heaven, and after all be disappointed. Many will suffer the severest of all disappointments. Will any of the lost spirits weep as bitterly as those who thought, till the very last, that they were going to be admitted into the mansions of bliss? Jesus would save us from receiving this agonizing refusal. He warns us beforehand not to be satisfied with a form of religion, but to seek for a new heart and a right spirit.

Evening Scripture portion. Heb. XIII. *Doing the will of God.*

MATT. VII. 24 to end.—*The parable of the house on the rock and the house on the sand.*

CHRIST ended his sermon on the mount by warnings against the danger of an empty profession of religion. He first gave the warning in *plain* language, saying, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Then he related a parable on the subject. It is the *first* of his parables recorded. It resembles his *last* parable in this point: both of them convey an awful warning to false professors of religion. In the parable of the talents an unprofitable servant is described, who is cast into outer darkness. (Matt. xxv. 30.) And in *this* parable a foolish builder is spoken of, who, we have reason to believe, was crushed beneath the ruins of his own house. Why did Jesus thus begin and end his series of parables with warnings

against the same sin? Was it not that he knew the great danger in which we stand, of being satisfied with a mere form of godliness?

Nothing is said about the sort of house the wise man built upon the rock. It may have been a large, or a small one; a splendid house, or a mean one, we know not; but it was a *safe* one. The foundation was good. The foundation is the unseen part of a house, and yet the most important. So it is in religion. The unseen part is the most important. What is the state of the heart? that is the most important question. Has it been humbled before God? Has it believed in Christ, and been sprinkled with his blood? Has it been sanctified by the Holy Ghost? These are the important points; yet these are the invisible points. None do the sayings of Christ but those who are truly converted; they alone love him; and there is no obedience where there is no love.

The foolish man may have built a better house, in some respects, than the wise man did. The passers-by may have admired it more. He himself may have been much pleased with it. But it had one capital fault, the foundation was bad. Instead of digging deep down in the solid rock, as the wise man did, he had been satisfied with a foundation in the sand. His house was *unsafe*; the higher it was, the greater would be its fall in the stormy day. As long as the weather continued fair, the house remained standing. As it was situated by the seaside, it was exposed to the fury of the waves as well as that of the winds. The tempest at length arose, and the house fell. How awful was the crash! how total the ruin! The waves would carry its beams and its planks to distant shores.

There is a day coming when the floods of great waters will try every building, and prove its strength. How strange it is that any should imagine themselves safe because they have *heard* the gospel! This is one of Satan's devices. If he cannot keep us from hearing the truth, he tries to persuade us to be satisfied with hearing; whereas, hearing should always be followed up by praying, and praying by doing. Yet, after all, it is not our own obedience that will save us, but the obedience of Him who bore the punishment of our sins upon the cross. If we believe in Jesus, we are built upon the rock of ages, and shall be able to endure the storm that will destroy the world, and all that is therein.

Evening Scripture portion. James I. *Hearers of the word.*

LUKE VII. 1-10.—*The believing Centurion.*

How interesting every character must be whom the Saviour approved! He, who will be the Judge of each of us, has shown us before-

hand what sort of persons he approves. This centurion was highly commended by the heart-searching Redeemer. Yet we should not have expected to find pity in a *centurion*. For, in the first place, he was a *soldier*, and a warlike life is a great hinderance to the soul. In the second place, he was a man of *rank*: and rank, we know, is a temptation to be proud. He was placed over a hundred soldiers, who were themselves men of some consideration; so that this centurion was perhaps equal in importance to a general in our armies. Thirdly, he was a *Gentile*, and therefore a heathen by birth. He had been sent by the Romans, who had conquered the Jews, to reside in Canaan. There he must have heard the Old Testament, and become acquainted with the true God, and believed the promise of a Saviour. The report of our Lord's miracles had reached him, and had convinced him that Jesus was the Son of God. Thus, though a soldier, a man of rank, and a Gentile, he was a true believer.

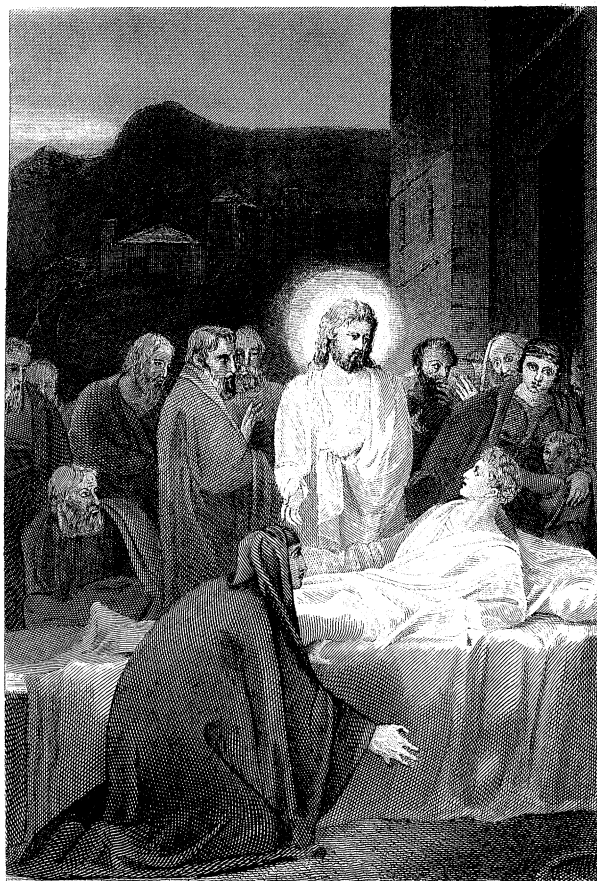
Now let us examine the character of him who was commended so highly by the Lord.

Observe his *compassion*. He was deeply interested in his poor servant's illness, for this servant was *dear* unto him. True religion binds the hearts of masters and servants together, and makes them brethren, beloved in the Lord. (See Epistle to Philemon, v. 16.)

Observe also his *love to the people of God*. He loved the *Jews*, because they were the peculiar people of God; and he did not love them in *word* only, but in *deed* and in *truth*, for he had built them a synagogue. Thus he had shown his love by his liberal actions.

Observe also his *humility*. Far from being puffed up with a conceit of his own merit, in having built a synagogue, he thought himself unworthy to come to the Saviour, or to receive him beneath his roof. St. Matthew in his Gospel says the *centurion* came to Jesus; but, it is common to say people do things *themselves* when they cause *others* to do them. St. Luke gives a *longer* account of the circumstance, and mentions that some elders of the Jews were *sent* by the centurion. His respectful conduct was the more remarkable, because Jesus was poor and despised, but in the eyes of this honorable soldier, the lowly Nazarene was greater than the greatest of the sons of men. Being a *Gentile*, he thought he was less acceptable to Christ than the Jews, who were descended from the beloved Abraham, the friend of God. But in this he was mistaken, for Christ is no respecter of persons, and ever loved the children of Abraham in *spirit* above his children in the *flesh*. This Gentile *resembled* the Father of the Faithful, and was his son in *spirit*.

Lastly, let us consider his *faith*. It was in faith that he resembled Abraham. He had such faith, that he believed that if Jesus did but speak the word, all creatures must obey, even as his *own* soldiers and servants obeyed *him*. He thought that Christ's power was equal to that of God, who said, "Let there be light, and there was light." Nor was he mistaken; for all things were created by Jesus Christ, and are



upheld by the word of his power. This faith was exceedingly pleasing to the Saviour. Jesus loves faith. He plants it in the heart as the root of every other grace. Behold how he rewarded the centurion's faith! he healed his servant.

What peace we should enjoy, if in all our difficulties we felt that Jesus was able to deliver us! When our dear friends are sick, let us believe that He need only speak the word, and they would be well. Whatever anxiety presses on our hearts, let us bring it all to him, spread it before him, and trust him to do what will be best for us. If we act thus, we shall experience such mercies as will overwhelm us with gratitude.

Jesus declared that he had never met with such great faith in *Israel*, as he had found in this *Gentile*. He then took occasion to declare a very delightful and a very awful truth. It is recorded by St. Matthew, (viii. 11, 12,) "*Many* shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing."

By the "children of the kingdom," Jesus meant the Jews. They *heard* the sayings of Christ, and *did* them not; but many in distant lands would hear them and do them.

In our days the gospel has been preached in the North and South, the East and West; and already some in every part have believed. The Esquimaux, known among his nation as "the man the Saviour took to himself," shall he not come from the *north* to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Africanus, once a ferocious chief, afterwards the missionary's faithful friend, shall he not come from the *south*? Abdool, the proud Mohammedan, grown as humble as a little child, shall he not come from the *East*? and though poor and despised like her Lord, shall not Sarah, the Indian widow*—the patient, the forgiving Sarah, come from the West to join the blessed company of patriarchs and prophets? God grant that none of us may be thrust with unbelieving Jews into outer darkness.

Evening Scripture portion. Heb. XI. 1-19. *Faith.*

LUKE VII. 11-17.—*The raising of the widow's son.*

THERE are only *three* instances recorded of the Lord Jesus raising the dead, and in each instance was a case of aggravated sorrow.

The dead man of Nain was the *only* son of a widow; he was the

* See a tract published by the Religious Tract Society, entitled "Poor Sarah, the Indian Widow."

earthly *all* of his mother, the object of her fondest affections, and perhaps the support of her declining years.

If any of us have ever seen a widow who has sustained such a loss, what anguish of heart we have witnessed! How has she dwelt on the attractive qualities of the lost one; how has she lamented her own desolation, and said, in the bitterness of her soul, Is there any sorrow like unto my sorrow? No doubt we felt compassion for the bereaved parent, but not *such* as Jesus felt at the sight of the widow of Nain; for no heart was ever tender as the heart of the Redeemer.

What tenderness he showed in his manner of performing the miracle! He first addressed the sorrowful mother, saying, "Weep not." *We* should but mock the afflicted, if we were to say, "Weep not." We can only weep *with* those that weep. But Jesus could remove the cause of grief. Though himself a man of sorrows, he tasted the pure joy of comforting mourners. If the mother looked up, she beheld him through her tears approach the bier. What a moment of expectation that was! We do not know whether the bearers had faith to believe that Jesus could raise the dead, but they stood still in his presence. Then the majestic command was heard, "I say unto thee, Arise."

On what a scene that young man opened his eyes! There was his fond mother—but who was this wonderful person standing close beside him? He began to speak. By speaking he proved that he was really alive. What were his first words? We are not informed. Did he inquire who had restored him to life? He soon must have known, for he who had snatched him from the grasp of death, now delivered him into the arms of his mother. This sweet office the Lord would perform himself. It must have been a solace to his loving heart to behold the joyful meeting of the parent and the child.

But his chief reason for performing miracles was to confirm his word. By raising the widow's son, he showed that he could bestow life. He had declared, "All that are in the graves shall hear my voice, and shall come forth." Yet there will be a great difference between *that* resurrection, and *this* of the young man, because the dead will then be *changed*; whereas, this young man wore again his corruptible body. Jesus was the *first* who rose from the dead with a glorified body, no more to die.

Would we be partakers in the resurrection from the grave, we must *now* experience *another*—a resurrection from the death of trespasses and sins. This is the most wonderful of all; but Jesus can bestow it by his word. "The hour is coming, and *now is*," said the Lord of life, "when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and *live*." Yes, the hour *now is* when the dead hear the voice of the Son of God and live. The dead in trespasses and sins hear the voice of the Christ in his holy word; they believe, and *live*. As the apostle Paul said to the Ephesians, "You hath he quickened, (or made alive,) who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Eph. ii. 1.) These very words that

Jesus spake to the widow's son, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise," have aroused some dead in *sins*, and caused them to live to God.

Evening Scripture portion.

1 Cor. XV. 35 to end. *The resurrection of the dead.*

LUKE VII. 18-23.—*The visit of John the Baptist's disciples.*

WE know that John at this time was shut up in prison. While there he was visited by his disciples. Though they had often been directed to look to Jesus as the Saviour of the world, it appears they now doubted whether he was the true Messiah so long expected. They did well to come to their teacher to express their doubts. It is always well to confide such thoughts to those who are able to help us, for by hiding them in our own bosoms, we may often occasion ourselves much uneasiness, and expose ourselves to great danger. It would, indeed, be very wrong to express our doubts to ignorant, or unbelieving persons, but it is wise to open our minds to experienced Christians.

The disciples of John must have heard reports of the miracles which Jesus did, but they did not believe these reports. Probably they were prejudiced against the Lord on account of his manner of life, which was very unlike that of John; for Jesus freely mixed with sinners, and ate and drank with them, while John had always led a solitary life, and had lived upon the coarsest fare. John took an excellent method to convince his unbelieving disciples. He sent them to Jesus.

We often find that the Lord refused to perform miracles to convince unbelievers. When the Pharisees asked him for a sign, he said they should have none but that of the prophet Jonas, (the sign of the resurrection.) But he did *not* refuse to perform miracles to convince these inquirers. What was the reason of this difference? No doubt he knew that they were *desirous* to believe, and he always treats those with great compassion who are *anxious* to know the truth.

If any doubt whether the Gospel is from heaven, let them go and witness its effects. Behold John Newton, the slave-dealer, transformed into a tender-hearted man, who delights in freeing the slaves of Satan. Behold thousands of blind idolaters throwing away their idols and abandoning their vicious practices. But time would fail us even to glance at the wonders the Gospel has wrought among all nations, from the days of Paul until now.

Yet still it is necessary to hearken to our Saviour's warning: "Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." Blessed is he whosoever shall believe in me in spite of all he sees in me to hinder his

believing. By these words Jesus taught John's disciples, that notwithstanding his miracles, many would refuse to believe in him.

There are still many temptations not to believe in Jesus. The world does not believe in him—this is one temptation; there are so many hypocrites and inconsistent Christians—this is another temptation; the people of God are generally poor, mean, and unlearned—this is another stumbling-block; and the doctrine of salvation by faith is unpleasant to proud and earthly hearts—this is the greatest stumbling-block of all. But those who believe, notwithstanding all these hinderances, shall receive this blessing. “Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

We have reason to hope that John's disciples did believe in Jesus, because they appear to have been men of a right spirit. When they returned, according to the Saviour's command, to their imprisoned master, and related the wonders they had seen, how great must have been the joy of that faithful man! His gloomy prison must have been enlightened by the tidings of his Saviour's glory. Nothing cheers the servants of God so much as to hear of the triumphs of their Lord. They rejoice when they read of the success of missionaries in far distant lands, and they look forward to the day when every knee shall bow to the eternal Son of God. Are *our* hearts interested in these great and glorious subjects? are they wrapped up in the insignificant occurrences of the passing hour? We all have selfish hearts by nature; but God can enlarge them by his grace, and make them delight in those events which are the joy of saints and angels.

Evening Scripture portion. Isa. XXXV. *The triumphs of the Gospel.*

MATT. XI. 7-17.—*Jesus commends John the Baptist.*

God has said, “Them that honor me I will honor.”—(1 Sam. ii. 30.) John the Baptist honored Christ much in his preaching, and now we hear how greatly Christ honored him. The Lord, who knows all men, declared that no prophet greater than John had ever appeared. Elijah, who raised the widow's son, was not greater; for though John had performed no miracle, he knew more of Christ than any who had come before him.

Jesus reminded the people of the time when John preached in the wilderness, and asked them why they had gone there. Was it to see one of the *reeds*, shaken by the wind? No; they had not gone to see a *common* sight, but to see an *extraordinary* sight. Was it a magnificent *worldly* sight that they had gone into the wilderness to see? No; if they had desired to behold splendor and magnificence they would

not have gone into the *wilderness* to search for it. It is kings in their palaces who are arrayed in gorgeous dazzling garments; whereas John the Baptist was only clothed in skins, and a leathern girdle; there was nothing to please the eye in his appearance. Why then had they gone into the wilderness? To hear a *prophet*. Jesus reminded the people of this, to show them how much spiritual good they *ought* to have gained from their visits to the wilderness. But many had derived no benefit from these visits; if they had, they would have received Christ as the Son of God, for John had preached concerning him.

Jesus then declared that the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater even than John. The Lord had come to establish the kingdom of heaven upon earth. He had come to shed his blood for the sins of men. Those who believe in the crucified Saviour are greater in knowledge than John the Baptist; for they know the way of salvation more fully than he did. We live in the latter days, and God has spoken to us by his Son, and by his apostles, the least of whom was a greater prophet than John. How shall *we* escape if we neglect so *great* salvation?

What did Jesus mean by the expression, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force?" By the *violent*, we believe, He meant those worldly persons who persecute his servants. As John had suffered imprisonment, and would also suffer death, for preaching the truth, so from his days would all the faithful servants of the Lord be subjected to much suffering for their Master's sake. Violent men would endeavor to *rob* and destroy by force the kingdom of heaven.

Then the Lord made a declaration that must have surprised many of those who heard him. He said that John was the Elias (or Elijah) spoken of by Malachi in the last chapter of his prophecy. (Mal. iv. 5.) "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord." John was not Elijah himself, but he had come in the *spirit* and *power* of Elijah, being fervent in spirit and great in power, turning sinners to the Lord. Yet Jesus knew that many would not believe what he was now declaring, for he said, "*If* ye will receive it, this is Elias that was for to come. He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

We see from this passage, that Jesus knows what advantages we have enjoyed, and what use we have made of them. Have we heard faithful and impressive preachers? What effect have their sermons had upon our hearts? Have we been persuaded to strive earnestly to enter the kingdom of heaven? If we merely float down the stream, we shall at length be plunged into an abyss of misery. The tide is against us, and the wind is contrary. We must be anxious and earnest. The prayer of Jacob suits every perishing sinner, "I will **not** let thee go, except thou bless me."

Evening Scripture portion. Mal. IV. *Elijah*

LUKE VII. 29-35.—*Jesus reproves the Jews for their perverseness.*

WE now refer to St. Luke's account of our Saviour's discourse about John the Baptist, because it contains some particulars omitted by St. Matthew.

The Lord Jesus declared that the people, and even the publicans, believed John the Baptist's preaching, while the Pharisees despised it. The publicans were gross sinners, most of them being notoriously dishonest in the collection of taxes. When John declared to them that their sins were great, and deserved punishment, they justified God, that is, they acknowledged that God's sentence was *just*, and they gladly received baptism as a sign of their need of being cleansed from their iniquities. But when John delivered the same truths to the Pharisees, telling them they were the children of the devil, and a generation of vipers, they were offended; they rejected the counsel of God *against* themselves, and did not desire to be baptized, because they thought they were already clean in heart and in life. Thus it often is *now*. Some who have committed open gross sins are brought to repentance; while others, who have led regular, and apparently religious lives, will not believe that on account of the *secret* sins of their *hearts*, they ought to humble themselves before God.

The Pharisees treated the Lord Jesus in the same way that they had treated John—with contempt. They had found fault with John, because he led so solitary and so strict a life, being clad in skins, feeding on locusts and honey, and refusing to taste wine or strong drink, therefore they had said that he was possessed with the devil. But they could not find the same fault with Jesus; for he led quite an opposite life, eating and drinking like men in general, and mingling with the vilest sinners, that he might win their souls to God. Yet the Pharisees were not better pleased with him than with John, and profanely called him a glutton, and a winebibber, and a friend of sinners. But what was the reason that both John and the Lord Jesus were assaulted by the Pharisees' reproaches, when they were so different from each other in their manner of life? The reason was, that they both had declared the same unwelcome truths; they both had preached the necessity of repentance and faith.

Jesus related a short parable to describe the Pharisees' conduct. It was common for children in the market-place to play at rejoicing and at mourning. One party of children imitated the glad songs of the Jews at their marriages, and on other joyful occasions, (such as the return of a long-lost son,) while another party were expected to dance to the sound of their music. But sometimes sullen and wayward children would not join in the amusement. Then the other party would good-naturedly change the play and imitate the mournful music of funerals, (such as that made by the minstrels when Jairus' daughter lay dead,) expecting their companions to use sorrowful gestures and to

appear to weep; but the same froward children would object to this play also. Thus the Pharisees liked neither the strict manners of John the Baptist, nor the condescending behavior of the Lord. This was a proof that they hated their words of wisdom, for Jesus declared, "Wisdom is justified of all her children;" or rather, "Wisdom is justified *by* all her children." The children of wisdom, (or of God,) acknowledge his heavenly wisdom by whomsoever declared. If the Pharisees had been the children of God, they would have justified God both when John preached, and when the Lord himself preached.

People who hate the Gospel continue to excuse themselves for not attending to it, by accusing those who preach it of faults in their manner, or of errors in their life. These accusations proceed from enmity to the Gospel, and will not be received by God as excuses for neglecting it. If men could find fault with the Saviour's conduct, how impossible it is for a true Christian to escape censure, especially as he is liable to commit *real* errors! But O how great is the guilt of those who thus oppose the servants of God! They are enemies to their own souls.

God tries *every* means to turn sinners to himself; in his holy word, sometimes using tender entreaties, and sometimes denouncing awful warnings;—in his providence sometimes heaping mercies on our heads, and sometimes executing judgment. Should every means fail to melt, or to subdue our hearts, well may his wrath wax hot against us! Let us pray for an obedient and docile spirit, ready to listen to the word of the Lord, whether He speak in thunder, or in a small still voice.

Evening Scripture portion. Jer. VI. *Refusing to hearken.*

MATT. XI. 20-24.—*Christ upbraids three cities for their impenitence.*

WE find from this passage that the preaching of the Lord Jesus produced very little effect upon men's hearts. In order that people be converted, it is necessary, not only that the *preaching* be faithful, but that the *hearts* of the hearers be prepared: for otherwise the tongues of holy men, or of angels, or even of the Son of God, may speak in vain.

The cities in which our Saviour most frequently preached were Chorazin, Bethsaida, and especially Capernaum. We are inclined to exclaim, "Blessed cities!" But Jesus says, "*Wo* unto thee, Chorazin!" The preaching of the Son of God was not a blessing to that city, but a curse. And now the very place where it stood cannot

be ascertained. Travellers may still visit Bethlehem and Nazareth, Jericho and Sychar, and many other ancient cities; but if they inquire for Capernaum, and Chorazin, and Bethsaida, they will get no certain answer.

There is a very wonderful truth contained in the words of Christ, just read by us. Jesus declared that Tyre and Sidon, two heathen cities, would have repented, if they had seen the miracles he had performed in Israel; and that Sodom, that most wicked city, would also have repented, and been spared the "vengeance of eternal fire." We see therefore that Jesus not only knows all that *does* happen, and all that *will* happen; but that he also knows all that *would* have happened, in every possible case. He knows how each heathen city would have received his word, had she heard it. He does not explain to us his reasons for not giving that light to Tyre and Sidon which he bestowed on the cities of Israel. He giveth an account of none of his matters. The Judge of all the earth will do right, and none may dare to say, or even to *think*, "What doest thou?" At the last day his justice in his dealings with men will be seen and acknowledged by the assembled universe. The degree of every person's punishment will be exactly proportioned to his guilt; and that guilt will be measured by his advantages, and by the use he made of them. And can we hear this without reflecting upon our own case? How great are the privileges we enjoy! There have been heathens, who, as soon as they were told of the love of Jesus in dying for their sins, began to repent. A Hindoo set out on a pilgrimage to Juggernaut, carrying with him a few tracts which he had not read. Being detained on the way by the illness of his wife, he had the opportunity of reading them attentively. Did he proceed to Juggernaut? No; he set out on a better pilgrimage. Desiring to persuade his countrymen to turn to the Lord, he often read aloud to little assemblies in the open air. While thus engaged, a poor native passed by, stopped to listen, was struck by what he heard, asked a few important questions, and immediately determined to give himself to Him who had bought him with his blood.*

Are not those Hindoos a reproach to any who, having heard many sermons, and read many chapters, and received much instruction, have not repented yet? Surely if *we* repent not, we shall be thrust down to the *lowest* hell; far, far below the wickedest of the heathens.

But Jesus will himself bestow repentance on all who seek this precious grace. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give *repentance* to Israel and forgiveness of sins," (Acts. v. 31.)

Evening Scripture portion. Jer. XVIII. *Judgment on impenitent nations.*

* Report of the Religious Tract Society for 1845, p. 58.

MATT. XI. 25 to end.—*Christ offers a thanksgiving to his Father, and invites the heavy laden to come to Him.*

WE have now read the end of our Saviour's discourse to the people, after John the Baptist's messengers had departed. The *beginning* of the discourse contains warnings and reproofs, but the *end* is filled with thanksgivings, invitations, and entreaties. Jesus intermingled prayer to his Father with his addresses to the people. What a privilege we enjoy in being permitted to know what he said to his Father! He spoke aloud that men might be edified; for on one occasion he declared, when engaged in prayer, "because of the people which stand by, I said it," (John xi. 42.)

Often our blessed Lord offered up prayer accompanied by tears, (Heb. v. 7;) but on this occasion heavenly joy must have enlightened his countenance, for St. Luke informs us that "he rejoiced in spirit," (Luke x. 21.) And what was the cause of his joy? It was, that God had revealed these things to babes, *though* he had hid them from the wise and prudent. *What* things? Things respecting himself; the things about which John the Baptist's disciples had inquired: "Art thou he that shall come, or look we for another?" (ver. 3.) These things many babes knew. By *babes* ignorant people are meant, those who *feel* their ignorance, and desire to be taught of God. To such babes (whether learned or not in *worldly* things) God reveals his Son, while he leaves the wise and prudent in *their own sight* to blindness and darkness. Such were the Pharisees. Though really blind and dark, they thought they knew the way of salvation; for *Satan* had blinded their minds, as it is written in 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4: "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ (who is the image of God) should shine into them."

Let us pray to God to give us the spirit of a *babe*, a humble, teachable spirit, and then Christ will reveal to us that heavenly knowledge which can save our souls. It seemed good in the Father's sight that babes should be instructed. We need not, therefore, fear a repulse from our heavenly Father, if we come confessing our ignorance and desiring to be taught. And who is the Teacher that He has appointed? It is the meek and lowly Jesus. Hear him say, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." Who would not delight in receiving instruction from such gracious lips? How sweetly he encourages sinners to approach!—"Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And does not his invitation include every child of man? Every sinner is weary and heavy laden. Penitent sinners mourn for the *guilt* of sin; but those who are not penitent feel the misery of its *bondage*. They may not know what it is that interrupts their happiness; they may think it is the circumstances in which they are placed; but it is the sin that dwells in them, and

holds them in captivity. Jesus alone can free the soul from the chain of its sins ; he alone can bestow rest. They that believe in him do enter into rest ; they can say of their Shepherd, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures ; he leadeth me beside the still waters."

How happy are they who early choose the Lord for their friend and master ! They will find his yoke easy, and his burden light ; they will find that, instead of binding burdens upon them, he himself bears their burdens. Ask those who have been *long* engaged in this service, whether they have not found his yoke easy and his burden light. They will tell you that in the brightest days of heedless youth, they never tasted that peace which they have found in the darkest nights of pious old age.

Evening Scripture portion. Ps. CXVI. *The rest of the soul.*

LUKE VII. 36 to end.—*The penitent weeping at the feet of Jesus.*

Two opposite characters are described in this interesting history ; Simon the Pharisee and the weeping sinner !

Simon was probably respected by his neighbors, and accounted a religious man, but he was *not* accepted in the sight of Jesus. The woman had been a gross and open sinner, yet she was accepted by her Saviour. Now what was the reason of this difference ? Does Jesus love sin ? God forbid !

The reason of the difference was, that Simon did *not* love Jesus, and the poor woman did love Him. The Pharisee showed his want of love by neglecting to pay him the attention usually shown in that country to guests. He neither gave him water to wash his feet, nor ointment to anoint his person, nor did he bestow the customary salutation. The woman showed her love to Jesus by coming into the house where he was, notwithstanding the scoffs and frowns of the master and his friends ; by standing at his feet washing them with her tears, kissing them with respectful affection, and anointing them with precious ointment. The customs of that country rendered it easy for the poor penitent to enter the house. Jesus was reposing, according to the eastern fashion, upon a sofa, and his feet were in such a position that the woman, while she stood behind him, could weep over them and anoint them.

Let us now ask *why* the woman loved Jesus so *much*, and the Pharisee loved him so *little*, or rather not at all ? Jesus himself explained the reason in his parable. He had forgiven the woman a mighty debt. She knew that he had forgiven it, and *therefore* she loved him ; for this is the meaning of the 47th verse. Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, (not *because* she loved much, but) *therefore* she loved much. Jesus *first* forgave her, and *then* she loved Him.

Jesus does not say that the Pharisee's debt was *really* small. He related this parable to show his host that if he *thought* his debt small, he could not love him much, even *if* he forgave him his debt. Do we wish to know whether *we* love Jesus much? Let us ask ourselves what we think of our *debt*. Do we think it *small* or large? Do we think that our sins are many or few? By nature we *all* think that our debt is small. Yes, even murderers think that their sins are not so great as they appear, and that they are excusable on account of their many temptations.

Thus we all excuse ourselves in our own sight, and think it an easy thing for God to forgive us such little debts. While we remain in this state of mind, we cannot love Jesus much. In fact, we cannot love him *at all*, and we cannot be accepted in his sight. But if Jesus, by his Spirit, touch our hearts, then we perceive that our sins are very great, and we cry to Him, "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is *great*." It is not the *acts* of sin that we chiefly lament, but the *secret* sins of our hearts. These, we feel, are set in the light of God's countenance, and cannot be forgiven without the shedding of the Saviour's blood. People often remain a long while in great distress on account of their sins; but when they can believe that there is forgiveness with God, and that he has washed them from their sins, they are filled with gratitude; then they love much, because Jesus has forgiven much.

Never do we lament our sins so much, as when we think of our Saviour's infinite love. When is it we regret most our offences against an *earthly* friend? Is it not when we find that while we have been *neglecting* him, he has been *laboring* for our good; that when we have been *suspecting* him, he has been *pleading* for us? This is the grief that the true penitent feels. This was the grief that caused the woman to shed such abundant tears upon the feet of Jesus.

Evening Scripture portion. 1 Peter I. *Love to Christ*.

LUKE VIII. 1-3.—*The women who followed Jesus.*

IN these verses we have a description of our Saviour's diligence, of his poverty, and of his humility.

His *diligence* was unwearied. He went as an itinerant (or a wandering preacher) from place to place. He knew the value of the souls of men, and the danger in which they lay; and being full of love, he delighted in declaring the glad tidings of salvation.

Though all are not called to *preach*, as he was, all are called to promote the salvation of their fellow-sinners. Yet how many, far from endeavoring to convert others, are themselves content to remain

unconverted! They are too *slothful* to inquire earnestly, "What shall we do to be saved?" though they are often eagerly asking, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" How strange it seems to spend so much anxiety upon a *dying* body, and so little upon a *never-dying* soul!

While Jesus was upon earth, there were some women who accompanied him from place to place to hear his word. They were bound to him by ties of gratitude, having been healed by him of various infirmities.

Mary Magdalene, or Mary of Magdala, (the town from which she came, as it is supposed,) had once been possessed by seven devils. We should not conclude from this circumstance that she had been peculiarly wicked. The possession of devils seems to have been an *affliction* rather than a sin; for we never find that Jesus rebuked the *persons* who were possessed, but only the *devils*. Many have supposed that Mary Magdalene was the woman who washed the Redeemer's feet with her tears; but there is no evidence to prove this opinion to be true. Yet Mary loved Jesus with the same devoted affection as that poor weeping sinner did; she followed him to his cross, and shed tears at his grave, and had the honor of being the *first* to behold him after his resurrection.

Another woman, who followed him, was the wife of Herod's steward. The bad examples of Herod, and of Herodias, had not hindered her from embracing that Gospel which her superiors despised. She also continued faithful to Jesus at his death, and at his grave.

Such was the *poverty* of Jesus, that he permitted these holy women and many others to contribute to his support. "They ministered unto him of their substance." Surely we think it *was* an honor to be allowed to give to him, who gave them all things. It is an honor that *we* may share with them. Though we may have little to give, yet, if we bestow that little in a spirit of love upon the least of the saints, we give unto Jesus himself.

Observe the *humility* of Jesus in accepting alms. That independent spirit, which the world so much commends, proceeds from pride of heart. It is right to desire to work for our own subsistence, rather than to receive charity; but when reduced to poverty, it is wrong to feel pain in accepting gifts from those who are richer than ourselves. Jesus *could* have turned *stones* into bread, but he chose rather to *receive* bread from his creatures. Thus he set us an example of humility.

It is supposed that it was about this time that a circumstance recorded by Mark took place. "They went into an house, and the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him, for they said, He is beside himself." (See Mark iii. 19-21.) It seems probable that Jesus went into this house that he

might rest his wearied frame and refresh himself with bread ; but the multitude, anxious for his presence, induced him to resume his fatiguing labors. His friends, perhaps his unbelieving relations, (for some of them did not believe on him,) thought that he was mad, because he complied with the people's desire. They knew not his *motives*, and *therefore* they thought he was beside himself. When a person acts in a manner for which we can see no *motive*, we think that person must have lost his reason. If a person were to rush into this room, uttering loud cries, we should conclude he was mad ; but if we found that the house was on fire, we should no longer wonder at his behavior, for we should think a house being on fire a sufficient *motive* to justify his earnestness.

The world are astonished at the earnestness of devoted Christians, because they cannot understand their *motives*. The believer beholds by faith a glorious heaven, and a dreadful hell ; a gracious Saviour, and a malicious tempter ; immortal souls, and approaching judgment. He must therefore be earnest in attempting to save his fellow-sinners from perdition. The world beholds none of these things, and naturally wonders at the conduct of the Christian. Does the earnestness of devoted Christians astonish *us* ? Do we say, "What is the need of all these exertions ? Why cannot people be religious without pressing their opinions upon others ?" If we think thus, is there not reason to fear that we know not the value of souls, and that we believe not in the wrath to come ?

Evening Scripture portion. Acts XXVI. *Paul accused of madness.*

MATT. XII. 22-30.—*Christ disproves the Pharisees' blasphemous accusation.*

How dreadful was the accusation which the Pharisees ventured to make against the Saviour ! They were not able to deny that he had performed an astonishing miracle ; therefore they accused him of casting out devils through the power of Beelzebub, (or Satan,) the prince of the devils. We see from this instance, that wicked men will always find some excuse for not believing in God. Sometimes they say that there is not sufficient proof that the Bible is true ; but if their objections are answered, still they refuse to believe, and find some other excuse, however absurd, rather than give up their sins, and come to Christ for pardon. But we ought not to be impatient with those that oppose themselves to the truth. We should imitate Christ, who calmly answered the Pharisees. Jesus sometimes spoke severely to them, but never in answer to their reproaches against himself. He always

behaved meekly when reviled by his enemies ; thus setting us an example, that we should follow his steps.

He gave *two* reasons to prove that he did not cast out Satan by Satan's help. In the *first* place, he said that Satan would not assist him to injure his *own* kingdom ; and in the *second* place, he asked the Pharisees by whom their children cast out devils ; for there were certain persons among the Jews, called exorcists, who *professed* to be able to cast out devils, though it is not certain whether they could *really* do so or not. Sceva, mentioned in Acts xix., was one of those "exorcists." Jesus knew that the Pharisees would never acknowledge that their own children, or friends, cast out devils by Satan, and therefore he declared that it was unreasonable to say that *he* was assisted by that evil spirit.

Then He related a very short parable to describe the work he was doing in the world. He compared himself to a man come to take possession of a house, and of the things in it. This house was the world, and the goods in the house were the souls of men. Jesus came to rescue these precious souls from Satan's power. He compared Satan to a strong man, who was in the house, and who tried to prevent him from coming in. Jesus came down to earth, and became a man that he might first bind Satan, and then spoil his goods ; that is, redeem the souls that had been taken captive by the wicked one.

Jesus is still engaged in releasing captives. He calls upon all whom he has rescued to join in the mighty work. Can there be any so base and ungrateful as to hesitate to obey the summons ? Those who hold back are counted by Jesus as his enemies. What an awful declaration there is in verse 30 ! "He that is not with me is against me ; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad." None can remain neuter ; all must be on one side or the other.

Great injury has been done to the Redeemer's cause by *not* speaking in its favor. When missionaries first proclaimed the gospel in Tahiti, they received this answer from some of the heathens ! "Were these things true, would not Captain Cook have told us of them long ago ? But neither he nor his sailors spoke about the religion that you teach ?" Thus we see that ungodly mariners, by *not* gathering with Christ, scatter abroad.

Some people imagine that if they do no harm *themselves*, they may go to those places where *others* speak and act wickedly. But there is a promise to him who shuts his eyes from *seeing* of evil. (Is. xxxiii. 16.) Those who love their crucified Saviour cannot stand by and hear his name profaned, and see his laws broken. Instead of being amused, they feel as Moses did when, coming down from the Holy Mount, he found Israel engaged in the worship of the golden calf.

Evening Scripture portion. Acts XIX. *Sceva the exorcist.*

MATT. XII. 31, 32.—*He warns against the unpardonable sin.*

THIS is a very awful part of our Saviour's discourse to the Pharisees. There *is* a sin which cannot be forgiven, and it is a sin of the tongue. Certain *words* which may be spoken against the Holy Ghost, are called, "Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." There is a mystery in this subject which we would not presume to attempt to remove. Yet we may form some idea of the nature of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, by examining the conduct of those whom Jesus now addressed. The Pharisees seem to have been convinced by the miracles of the Saviour, that he was a true prophet; but though convinced, they were determined to reject him, and to set the people against him also. In this awful state of mind they accused him of working miracles by the power of Satan, and not by the Spirit of God. Had they *really* supposed he was assisted by Satan, their sin would not have been so enormous; *then* they would have sinned, as Saul of Tarsus did, "ignorantly, in unbelief;" but now they sinned against the convictions of their conscience, and with deliberate malice.

That man has reached the highest pitch of wickedness, who, though himself convinced of the truth of the gospel, endeavors to persuade *others* to disbelieve it. We hope there are not many who act so daring a part. It is probable that infidels are generally deceived themselves, before they attempt to deceive others. Such a state of unbelief, dangerous as it is, is far better than conviction of the truth, accompanied by determined hatred against God. Such is the condition of devils, and of all the lost spirits. They cannot doubt the power of God; but while they believe and tremble, they vent blasphemies against his holy name. Is any soul distressed with the fear lest he should ever have committed the unpardonable sin? let him take comfort. His fears prove that he is not sealed up in final impenitence. At the same time, let us all beware of the deceitfulness of sin. Though every sin is not *unpardonable*, every sin is *dangerous*. Many who have never been guilty of the unpardonable sin, will nevertheless die unpardoned. Who can conceive how dreadful it is to feel you are dying, and that you are not pardoned. Some impenitent sinners die resting on *false* hopes; but others die in despair. Those who have stood by their death-beds, have declared that the sight of their agonies was too horrible to be endured.

Pardon, so little sought for by sinners while they live, is not always obtained when they are dying. The Hon. Francis Newport, an infidel, who died in 1692, in his last illness was heard to say, as he looked upon the fire, "O that I was to lie upon that fire for a hundred thousand years to purchase the favor of God, and be reconciled to him again! But it is a fruitless, vain wish; millions of millions of years will bring me no nearer the end of my tortures than one poor hour." This miserable man had not faith to come to the blood of Christ to wash away his

sins. The understanding may be convinced, while the enmity of the heart against God is not removed.

Evening Scripture portion. 1 John V. *Sin unto death.*

MATT. XII. 33-37.—*Jesus warns against idle words.*

BEHOLD an instance of the severe terms in which the meek and gentle Jesus sometimes rebuked sinners. He called the Pharisees a "generation of vipers." Thus he declared them to be the seed of the old serpent, and the children of Satan. They had accused him of casting out devils through the power of Satan, while they themselves belonged to the family of the wicked one. It is to be expected that the children of the devil should utter blasphemies, even as a bad *tree* brings forth bad *fruit*.

Though all have not reached the same height of wickedness as these Pharisees, yet all have by nature wicked hearts, that cannot bring forth really good fruit. If our hearts were in a right state, our *words* would be good. The tongue was given to man to bless God. David for this reason calls it his *glory*. "Awake, my glory." The tongue would indeed be the glory of man if his heart were right with God. What a noble use the angels make of their tongues! they unite in a never-ceasing song of praise to God. Adam, when first created, doubtless used his tongue for the same glorious purpose. But since the fall, the tongue has become the outlet of the abominations of man's heart: the evil treasure of his heart—his pride, his malice, his envy, his deceit—flow forth from his tongue. His heart is the black *fountain* of sin; his words are only the *streams*. We must be born again before we can utter words acceptable to God.

At the last day our words will be produced as the *evidence* of our state before God. It is true that many have *said*, "Lord, Lord," who have not loved God; but will *their* words be considered proofs of love? By no means; words *insincerely* spoken will be regarded as crimes. Those who *said* what they did not *feel*, whether to God or man, will be pronounced liars, and we know that *liars* shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. It is only good words that have proceeded from our *hearts* that will then justify us, or show that we were born again and washed in Christ's blood. If, then, we feel that we are not fit to stand this test, let us entreat God to bestow new *hearts* upon us. Then our common discourse will be tinged with the love of God. Just as an affectionate parent is often *speaking* of his children, because he is always *thinking* of them; so, when we love *God*, we shall be disposed to be often speaking of his power, and wisdom, and goodness, because we shall be often *think-*

ing of them. The daily duties of life will not interfere with our thoughts of God, any more than they prevent a loving mother thinking of her children. Every thing will remind us of our God. The beauties of creation, and the events of Providence, will lead us to think and to speak of Him; for in every thing we shall see his hand. What the world calls "good luck," we shall call "great mercy;" and what the world speaks of as unfortunate accidents, we shall own to be "loving corrections." But most of all shall we differ from the world in our expressions concerning the Son of God and his believing people. That Saviour we shall call "precious," his people "happy." It is true, those living in a Christian land seldom dare speak openly against Christ, but they show their real feelings by the contemptuous names they bestow on his most devoted servants. Their contemptuous words are *noticed* and *noted* down by God in his book, and shall be produced against them another day to their everlasting shame. "By their words they shall be condemned."

Evening Scripture portion. James III. *Sinful words.*

MATT. XII. 38-42.—*He refuses to give a sign to the Pharisees.*

It was *not* with a *sincere* desire to be convinced of the truth that the Pharisees wished for a *sign*. They had already witnessed so many miracles that they could not avoid knowing that Jesus was the Son of God. This was their great sin, that when they *knew* the truth they would not *confess* it. As our Saviour afterwards said, (in John xv. 24,) "If I had not done among them the works that none other man did, they had not had *sin*: but *now* they have both seen and hated both *me* and my Father."

The Pharisees were *determined* not to believe in Jesus. Whatever miracles he might perform, whatever signs he might show, they had made up their minds already; they would not believe on him themselves, nor let *others* believe on him. It is evident that this was their state of mind from their conversation when together. (See John xi. 47, 48.) "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." Did not these words betray an awful state of mind? It was worse than *unbelieving*; it was *malicious*. It is in this spirit that Satan himself opposes the kingdom of God.

And *what* was this *sign* from heaven for which the Pharisees asked? Probably it was one of those displays of glory that God once made on Mount Sinai, when He spoke from the midst of the fire, surrounded

by clouds and darkness, thunderings and lightnings. Christ could easily have manifested his glory in the same manner, and he will do so when he comes again to judge the world. But he refused to grant the Pharisees' arrogant demand, and told them that they should have no other sign than the *sign* of the prophet *Jonas*. And what was that sign? It was his own resurrection; for Jonah's burial in the midst of the whale was a type of his burial in the heart of the earth; and Jonah's escape through the mouth of the fish, was a type of his bursting the barriers of the tomb.

It may surprise us to know that Jesus would be *three* days and *three* nights in his grave, seeing he only lay there from Friday evening to Sunday morning. But the Jews had a peculiar way of reckoning time: they considered a day and night as *one* period, and they counted a *part* of this period, as if it were the *whole*. Therefore, as Jesus was *part* of three days in the grave, he was there three days and three nights, according to the Jewish mode of speaking.

The Saviour well knew that the Pharisees would not acknowledge him to be the Son of God, even when he rose from the dead; and so it proved; for when he did rise, and when the history of his resurrection was repeated to the chief priests and elders, how did they act? They bribed the soldiers who had guarded the tomb to deny the fact, and to say that the disciples had stolen his body away while they slept.

Well, therefore, might Jesus contrast the men of Nineveh with the Pharisees. The Ninevites repented when Jonah declared that in *forty* days their city should be destroyed. It is remarkable that in *forty* years from the time of our Saviour's resurrection, Jerusalem was destroyed, because the Jews repented not. The Pharisees despised the Ninevites on account of their being Gentiles, yet these Gentiles were far better than themselves.

The Lord then brought forward an instance of another *Gentile* who acted in an opposite manner from the Pharisees: it was the queen of Sheba, who came from a distant country to receive instruction from Solomon. There have been heathens in later days who have resembled this ancient sovereign in her desire to obtain heavenly wisdom. Some years ago, two natives of Ceylon left their spicy isle, and came to dwell for awhile in our cold climate, that they might learn the gospel of the blessed God. When they were about to return home, a friend presented to them a magnificent mirror, but they refused to accept it. They said to their venerable teacher, Dr. Adam Clarke, "Tell our friend we cannot accept the mirror. We will take nothing home with us but the Bible you gave us and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. To learn that gospel we crossed the ocean, and with it alone will we cross it again."

How unlike these disinterested Cingalese are those who for worldly reasons forsake the preaching of the truth! Whatever may be the advantages for which they give up that joyful sound, they make a poor exchange. Happy are those who can say with David, "One thing

have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." (Ps. xxvii. 4.)

Evening Scripture portion. 1 Kings X. *The Queen of Sheba.*

MATT. XII. 43-45.—*The parable of the unclean spirit.*

IT was in this alarming manner that our Saviour concluded his rebukes to the wicked Pharisees. We can scarcely call this short history a *parable*, because it appears to be a literal account of an event that has taken place. Still it is a parable, because it is partly figurative; the heart of a man is *likened* to a house. And is it really true that unclean spirits make the hearts of men their habitation? How can we doubt what our Saviour has so plainly declared?

Sometimes an evil spirit *forsakes* his habitation. This devil having left his house, travelled far through dry, or desert places, but found no rest. It seems probable that in the course of his wanderings he found no opportunity of injuring souls. Our enemy, we know, walks about seeking whom he may devour. Sometimes there is a restraint laid upon him, and he *cannot* perpetrate the evil that he desires; for he can do nothing without the permission of God. Perhaps this devil had left the man, hoping to make new conquests, and to increase the number of his victims; but when disappointed, he thinks of returning to his old abode. He says, "I will return unto my house, whence I came out." He claims the heart as his own property; he says, "*My* house." He returns and finds no obstacle to regaining possession of the soul he once inhabited. The house is not the less acceptable to him, because it is swept and garnished, or adorned. Nothing pleases Satan more than a show of piety in a wicked heart. The unclean spirit is not satisfied to dwell *alone*, but finds seven of his fellows to share his spoil. He selects some *more* wicked than himself, as his associates. There are *degrees* of wickedness even among *devils*, and no doubt pre-eminence in wickedness is their glory. It had been better for this miserable man, if the first inmate of his heart had never quitted it. But O! how infinitely better would it have been for him, if, when the devil had left him, he had opened his heart to the gracious Saviour! Jesus is willing to come whenever he is invited; often he stands and knocks, and no man opens the door, and at length he withdraws, no more to return. Then the wretched soul must become the prey of demons. Even as a house forsaken by man soon becomes the habitation of beasts and birds, so does the heart, when Jesus is absent, become the habitation of the spirits of hell.

The greater part of the Pharisees did not profit from the warning

Jesus gave them ; they grew more and more wicked ; they crucified the Lord of glory, and persecuted his apostles. But let *us* profit from it, and never count ourselves safe, except Jesus reign in our hearts. Saul, the King of Israel, appears to have been such a man as our Saviour described in this parable. The evil spirit that once tormented him, departed for a *season*, but soon returned and rendered him more wicked than before. All the evening of his days was spent in malicious persecutions of the innocent David, till he filled up the measure of his iniquity by consulting the witch of Endor.

Real conversion of the heart is the only preservative from Satan's malice. True believers alone are secure. There are evil days, days of peculiar temptation that come upon them, but neither seven wicked spirits, nor seventy times seven, can harm the heart fortified by the towers and bulwarks of *faith*. It is written, "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not," (1 John v. 18.) And how does he keep himself? He remembers his Lord's command, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

Evening Scripture portion. 1 Sam. XXVIII. *The witch of Endor.*

MATT. XII. 46 to end.—*He describes who are his mother and his brethren.*

SUCH were the gentle words which our Saviour added to a discourse containing many severe reproofs and awful warnings. The former discourse, recorded in Matthew xi., also ended with sweet encouragement : "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden." But the passage we have just read is still more condescending ! Who can value enough the honor of being mother, brother, and sister of the Lord of heaven and earth ! How wonderful it is that sinners like ourselves should be raised to the enjoyment of such a privilege !

What was the occasion on which the Saviour uttered the blessing to which we have just alluded ? His mother and brethren desired to speak with him, but were unable to approach on account of the crowd that surrounded him. By the term "brethren," we must understand not only those whom we call brethren, but also more distant relations. It is probable that they wished from motives of affection to interrupt his labors, which appeared too severe for his strength. Why would not Jesus comply with their request ? Because he saw multitudes of precious souls thronging around him, eager to hear the words of eternal life. Instead of admitting his relations immediately to his presence, he pronounced a blessing on his own disciples ; saying, "Behold my mother and my brethren."

We must not suppose that he felt no regard for his mother, or for

any of his relations, for we know that he bore to his mother such affection, that when hanging on the cross, he commended her with his expiring breath to the care of his beloved disciple. But by this expression, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" he taught us, that those united to him in *spirit* are nearer to him than those related to him in the *flesh*. His mother, indeed, was *spiritually* connected with him, for she was a true believer. Before the birth of her divine Son, she said, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour;" therefore he loved her both as his mother, and as his own redeemed. But he did not love *her alone*; he loved all those who did the will of his Father in heaven.

It was to do his Father's will that he came down from heaven; as he said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me;" (John vi. 38;) and he always did it *perfectly*. On one occasion he declared, "I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." How different is the state of the world! Every one by nature does his *own* will. Children soon betray their evil nature by striving to do their own, and not their parents' will. When they grow older, and hear the commandments of God, naturally they show no inclination to obey.

As soon as a person is converted, he begins to desire to do God's will. The 119th Psalm shows us how earnestly David sought to please his heavenly Father: "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes," (verse 5.) "Behold I have longed after thy precepts; quicken me in thy righteousness," (verse 40.) But why did David utter these prayers? Because he felt that he could not of himself do God's will; therefore he prayed for grace from on high.

The holy apostle Paul could say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Yet the sin of his nature troubled him. He said, "I see a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind." All the children of God endure the same inward struggles that Paul and David endured. Each of them can say,

"Though I fail, I weep;
Though I halt in pace,
Yet I creep
To the throne of grace."

But though they do not keep the Father's commandments *perfectly*, as Jesus did, they are comforted by knowing that He loves them.

It must have been delightful to hear him say on *earth*, "Behold my mother and my brethren!" How endearing was his attitude when he stretched forth his hands, to point out the objects of his love! The day will come when he will enclose his redeemed family in his everlasting arms, and declare, "Behold my mother and my brethren."

Evening Scripture portion.

Ps. CXIX. 1-32. *Prayers for grace to do the will of God.*

MATT. XIII. 1-18.—*Christ relates the parable of the sower, and explains why he spake in parables.*

WE have much reason to rejoice that our blessed Saviour explained the parable of the Sower; for had he not done so, many different opinions respecting its meaning would have been held, but now the signification is fixed and certain. We will, however, defer the consideration of it until we read our Lord's explanation.

After Jesus had finished his *public* discourse, he conversed privately with his disciples. In this conversation he declared some truths which have been much objected to by the world. His disciples inquired *why* he spoke in parables. In his reply, their Master unfolded some of the secrets of his Father's government. Can any thing be so interesting as the ways of God towards man! In this passage some light is shed upon them.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Unto *you* it is *given* to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not *given*." We learn from this declaration that heavenly knowledge is the *gift* of God. All men by nature are without the knowledge of their Maker, as it is written, "There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God." When Adam sinned, he lost the knowledge of his God, and all his children are born in this state of ignorance. They are not only ignorant of God: they have no *desire* to know him. There are many things of which we may be ignorant, yet which we should much like to learn. If a man well skilled in some useful art were to offer to teach gratuitously all who wished to learn, many would flock around him and become his scholars: for we naturally desire to learn useful arts. But though God offers to teach all who are willing to be instructed, very few come to him and say, "Teach me to do thy will." Nor would *any* come and make this prayer, unless God first, by his Holy Spirit, put the desire into the heart. When this desire is *felt*, then the prayer is made, and the longing soul is taught. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "Whosoever *hath*, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." There is an interesting account contained in a tract called "*Jejana*," of a little Hottentot girl who earnestly desired to know God. A black man, who knew but little himself, directed her to make this prayer, "Lord, help me; Lord, teach me." This prayer she often uttered when she knelt alone in some thicket. Such was her simplicity, that she added, "For David says thou wilt." The pious black man's name was David. And did God fulfil his promise to this poor child? Assuredly he did. She became known to a faithful missionary, who took her into his service, and fully instructed her in the gospel of Christ.

Such is God's goodness towards those who desire to know him. The Pharisees, far from having this desire, were determined to reject the warnings of the Saviour; therefore God gave them up to the

blindness and deafness that they loved. Every warning they rejected closed their eyes in deeper night.

How awful was their condition! But all are in danger of falling into it, who are not obeying the gospel call. Those who hear the Bible read from day to day—who listen to the preacher's earnest entreaties from Sabbath to Sabbath,—and who yet make no effort to go to Christ, are becoming more hardened and more difficult to be converted. How blessed might our eyes be, for round us the true light shines! Yet how doubly cursed will these eyes be, if we wilfully close them against that light.

Evening Scripture portion. Ps. XXV. *The secret of the Lord.*

MATT. XIII. 18-21.—*The explanation of the former part of the parable of the sower.*

THERE is one circumstance which renders this parable peculiarly interesting. It describes the characters of *all* persons who hear the gospel; therefore it must describe *ours*. Let us endeavor to discover by the help of God to which class we belong.

First: there are the way-side hearers: these seem to be careless persons, whose minds are so trifling that though they *hear* the words of the preacher, they do not *reflect* upon their meaning. We know that the seed represents the word of God, whether spoken by faithful ministers and parents, or instructors or friends, or in whatever way conveyed to the mind. But though the seed is good, it does not spring up in every heart. Why does it not? Because every heart is not *prepared* to receive it. As a beaten path is a soil not prepared to receive seed, so a heart full of trifling thoughts is not prepared to receive the gospel. Such a heart finds religious instruction a weariness, and rejoices when the sermon is over, and the chapter is finished.

It is to be feared that every congregation contains many of these careless hearers, who hear the sermons with little interest; but even on the way-side, a seed might occasionally spring up, were it not for the passers by who tread it down, and for the birds who pick it up.

How can we calculate upon the amount of good that is prevented by those spirits that throng the air! They are all marshalled under one experienced commander, even that old serpent who tempted our first parents. Satan knows how to choose the most favorable opportunities for exerting his power. It is after faithful sermons have been preached that his hosts are on the alert to efface any impression that may have been made. The persons who lie most exposed to his attacks are the inconsiderate, who have offered up no prayers for a blessing on the instructions they have received. What havoc is made every

Sabbath night and every Monday morning in the paths where the faithful preacher was seen sowing just before ! If Satan found people endeavoring to fix the sermon in their hearts by prayer and meditation, he would not have such great success. But is it surprising that he succeeds, when he finds so many who neglect secret prayer !

The next class of hearers appear at first sight more hopeful than the wayside hearers. The seed sometimes falls on stony ground, where there is a little light, though dry earth ; it soon springs up, but is soon withered by the heat of the sun.

The stony ground hearers receive the word with joy. When they hear the gospel, they attend, they remember, they are delighted, they determine to be Christians ; they begin to do many things that are right, but when they find difficulties in their way they change their minds, and become as worldly as before. What is the reason of this ? It is that their hearts were never softened by the Holy Spirit. They never were convinced of sin, they never *repented*. Repentance is the beginning of religion. Our Saviour's first sermon was, "Repent." If we think we can be Christians without repentance we are mistaken. We *must* be brought to see what ungrateful creatures we have been to our best Friend. We must be led to mourn over such ingratitude, and to entreat for pardon and grace. Paul sat three days after his conversion fasting, before Ananias came and said, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." Christians may feel different *degrees* of grief ; but they all *grieve*. Those who have felt no godly sorrow will easily be induced to return to the world ; they will never consent to make any great sacrifice for Christ's sake. They *cannot* resolve to give up a brilliant prospect, or to lose an advantageous situation, or to forfeit the favor of honorable persons. No ; they will sooner give up their religious profession, lose their hopes of heaven, and forfeit the favor of the glorious God.

Evening Scripture portion. 2 Tim. IV. *Demas*.

MATT. XIII. 22, 23.—*The explanation of the latter part of the parable of the sower.*

LET us now consider the two latter kind of hearers which our Saviour has described.

One is the thorny ground hearer : the soil of his heart is not so dry and barren as that of the stony ground hearer. The word sinks into it, and springs up, and blossoms, and buds, and produces fruit ; but, alas ! not good fruit. What is the reason of this failure ? Thorns have grown up with the good seed, and have injured the heavenly plants. The thorns may have appeared very small and insignificant

when first the seed was sown, but they increased in strength, and at length destroyed the hopes of the husbandman.

We cannot be at a loss to discover what the thorns represent; for our Lord distinctly declared them to be cares, riches, pleasures, and the lusts of other things. There are some people, who, when they hear the word, are arrested, touched, convinced, persuaded. They acknowledge they are sinners, they see Christ is the only Saviour; they feel the value of their souls, and they desire to lead a religious life. But their affections are drawn off from God by worldly things. The *stony* ground hearers were induced to abandon their profession through fear of persecution; the *thorny* ground hearers, while they continue to make a profession of religion, are enslaved by the love of the world. They attempt to serve God and mammon. What must be the result of such an attempt? Destruction. "For if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

The world wears many different forms, and tries to win us under various disguises. According to our age, our dispositions, and our circumstances will be our temptations. Pleasure allures the young, and care entangles the old: reputation is the desire of one, ease is preferred by another; but each of these is a thorn, and will prevent the good seed flourishing in the heart. What then can we do to avoid making a fruitless profession? We must apply to God to take the thorns out of our hearts; we cannot do it ourselves, but God is willing to do it for us. He can quench every inordinate desire, he can overthrow every earthly idol; he can come with sovereign power, and reign in our hearts.

No heart by *nature* is an honest and good heart. "There is none that understandeth and that seeketh after God." Every heart of nature is like the way-side, the stony ground or the thorny ground. God alone can prepare sinners to receive his word. He can plough up the way-side, can take away the stones, and can pluck out the thorns.

There is a gracious promise in the Scriptures that He desires us to remember: "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." Let us plead this promise in prayer. There is abundance of good seed scattered all over this land—thousands of Bibles, and millions of tracts. Why are not more souls converted? The hearts of men are unprepared.

Has God graciously prepared *our* hearts? Have we received the word, and brought forth fruit? If it be so with regard to any of us, to Him be all the praise who softened our hard hearts. Perhaps we can remember the time when sermons made no impression upon us, when holy counsels were disregarded, and even a mother's entreaties despised. And how did God prepare our hearts? Did He make us eat the bitter fruits of our works, till, like the prodigal, we said, "I will arise and go unto my Father?" Or did He subdue us in a sudden manner, as He did Paul, when He stopped him in the midst of his wicked career, ploughing up his heart by the Spirit, as the seed was

cast in, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Or did He lead us by gentle and gradual methods to seek his face, watering the ridges of our hearts, settling the furrows, making it soft with showers, and then blessing the springing of His word? (Ps. lxxv.)

Evening Scripture portion. Ez. XXXVI. 22 to end. *The heart of flesh.*

MATT. XIII. 24-30.—*The parable of the wheat and tares, with the explanation contained in ver. 36-43.*

THE parable of the wheat and tares in some respects resembles that of the Sower of the seed, but it differs from it in this respect. In the parable of the Sower we heard only of *good* seed; here we read also of *bad* seed. While Christ, by his faithful ministers, sows good seed, or the pure gospel, the devil by his servants sows *bad* seed, or false doctrines.

The good seed, where it takes root and prospers, produces the children of the kingdom, or true believers, while bad seed produces hypocrites, formalists, heretics, and other wicked characters, who are the children of the devil. We here behold the great danger to which we lie exposed, of having *bad* seed sown in our hearts. If we receive not the gospel, we shall receive some false doctrine. We all must have *some* kind of religion, and if we do not receive the *truth* in the love of it, we shall cling to our own foolish imaginations, or to some errors that we have heard; and shall flatter ourselves with the hope of reaching heaven by some other way than the Scriptures have revealed.

The bad seed is sown *cunningly* by the great enemy. Often he employs persons who *appear* religious to sow it; so that the hearers are deceived, and fancy that they are receiving *good* seed. But no seed is good but the doctrine of Scripture. How carefully we ought to study the Scriptures! reading them daily, endeavoring to understand their meaning, asking the help of pious people; above all, upon our knees entreating to be taught of God. We ought to believe no doctrine that cannot be clearly proved from the Scriptures; for, if it cannot be found there, it must be bad seed.

We see also from this parable, that the wheat and tares often resemble each other so much, that it is difficult to distinguish between them. For *why* did the lord of the field forbid his servants to pull up the tares? It was for fear lest they should mistake, and pull up wheat instead of tares. The servants represent ministers; they cannot always distinguish between true and false believers. It is God alone who knows the heart; he knows them that are his, and he alone

knows it with *certainty*. The disciples did not know that Judas was a devil; but Jesus knew it from the beginning. When Saul of Tarsus was first converted, the disciples at Jerusalem did not know that he was sincere, and were for some time afraid to receive him. We should not therefore be too much delighted with the approbation of our fellow-Christians, nor too much disquieted by their suspicions. We should come to God, and entreat him to examine our hearts. Like David, each should say, "Search me, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

But though true and false believers may appear so much alike in this world, the hour will arrive when their true characters will be made known. There is really the greatest difference between the character of the *weakest* child of God and the most *plausible* hypocrite. The hypocrite may appear even *better* than the child of God; but there is a difference in their *hearts*, which will cause them to be separated from each other to all eternity. God will give his angels wisdom to discern between the righteous and the wicked: they will separate many who have partaken of the same ordinances and lived in the same family.

The wicked shall be bound in bundles. Perhaps this expression is intended to show how they will add to each other's misery by mutual reproaches. The righteous will shine forth as the sun without one spot of sin to darken their brightness. It has been well said that three things will surprise us, if we enter heaven: first, to see so many there whom we did *not* expect to see; secondly, to miss so many whom we *did* expect to see; and thirdly, to find ourselves there; yes, ourselves, we who are so unworthy—lifted up from the dust, and exalted to a throne. O! may this surprise be ours! for there is another surprise that awaits many seeming Christians, who will confidently cry out, "Lord, Lord, open to us." Now, therefore, let us judge ourselves, that we may not be condemned with the world.

Evening Scripture portion. 2 Tim. II. *False doctrines.*

MARK IV. 21-29.—*Jesus encourages his disciples to communicate the word.*

THIS is part of a *private* conversation between our Lord and his apostles. If our minds were in a right state, how much more deeply should we be interested in such scenes than in the worldly trifles that surround us.

What did our Saviour say in these confidential moments? He

compared his disciples to a candle which he had lighted by his instructions, and was going to make burn still brighter by his explanation of the parables he had related in public. For what purpose did he give them light? that they might *conceal* it? No; but that they might set it upon a candlestick, and in *public* proclaim their Lord's *secret* communications. Jesus said, "There is nothing hid which shall not be manifested." He hid many holy truths under parables, but these truths were to be made manifest by the apostles' preaching. This command was fulfilled after his ascension. *Then* the apostles could say, that their sound had gone forth to the ends of the world. *Then* was fulfilled the prophecy, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings." We hear these glorious secrets: they are contained in the epistles, where the secret counsel of God is revealed. Do we attend to these things? Do we look into them, as the angels do? or are we indifferent? Have we need of the rousing command of our Saviour? "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

The Lord encouraged his disciples to preach the truth, saying, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." If they meted out, or gave the truth which they had received, abundantly to others, they should themselves receive abundantly from Christ, spiritual blessings. And so it is now: "He that watereth others, shall be watered also himself." In trying to do good to others, we gain a blessing on our own souls.

Our Saviour then related a short parable to encourage his disciples still more to sow the seed of the word. He spoke of a man who sowed seed, and who slept and rose night and day; that is, who, after sowing the seed, went about his usual business, sleeping at night and rising in the day; and who, after some time, found the seed had sprung up, but not by his *own* power, for he could not even tell *how* it had sprung up. God, who had made it spring up, made it grow also without his assistance, till it was ripe and fit to be cut down.

Thus a minister, after sowing the seed of the word, is obliged to leave the success with God; for he cannot make it spring up in the heart, neither can he even understand *how* souls are converted; for the manner in which men are born of the Spirit is even a greater mystery than the way in which the seed is quickened in the earth. Yet the hearts of ministers are often rejoiced by seeing the effects of the words they have spoken. Sometimes, however, the seed they sowed does not spring up till after their death; nevertheless, at the harvest of the last day, souls who heard their words shall be their crown and rejoicing. Now is the time to sow, though in tears, knowing we shall reap in joy.

Let all who *know* the word seek to *sow* it also, though it be only in the heart of a little child; for sowers on earth shall certainly be reapers in heaven. But let us remember that the seed sown does not come to perfection *immediately*: first, the blade appears, then the ear, at last

the full corn in the ear. We must, therefore, be patient with young converts. If we ourselves know any thing of Christ *now*, do we not feel that we have been grown very slowly?

It is refreshing to behold a Christian who is like full corn in the ear. Perhaps we have had the privilege of seeing such a person. It may be some poor destitute creature, lodging in a garret, has breathed a spirit that we longed to imbibe, and we have felt, while listening to her heavenly words, "It is good to be here." Do we *desire* to grow in grace? It is a good desire. The Lord will answer prayer, and give us more faith and love, and every heavenly grace, and then treasure us up in his eternal garner.

Evening Scripture portion. Eccl. XI. *Sowing seed.*

MATT. XIII. 31-35.—*Parables of the mustard-seed and of the leaven.*

WE will now consider several short parables that our Saviour related, but of which he gave no interpretation; still we may endeavor from other parts of Scripture to discover their meaning. The seed of the mustard-tree is smaller *in proportion* to the size of the tree it produces, than any other seed. In eastern countries the mustard-tree has immense spreading branches, which afford a fit shelter for the birds.

The religion of Christ was very small in its beginning. Behold the stable in Bethlehem, and that weak babe sleeping in the manger. From him shall spring a multitude that no man can number, of glorious saints, who throughout eternity shall surround the throne of God. These his spiritual children shall exceed the stars in multitude. Already how wonderfully has the Christian religion spread! though preached at first by twelve poor unlearned men—the kings of many nations profess to believe in it. It shall spread yet further, till men shall not merely *profess* the name of Christ, but till all shall praise him with unfeigned lips—till all shall know the Lord from the greatest unto the least.

The next parable, of the leaven that leavened by degrees a large quantity of meal, much resembles the parable of the mustard-tree, and it has been generally supposed to have nearly the same meaning. There is one great difference between the parables; the growth of the mustard-tree is *open*; the effects of the leaven in the meal are *secret*. Some persons have thought that while the growth of the mustard-tree represents the progress of the gospel in the *world*, the leavening of the meal shows its influence in the *heart*. The leaven is generally considered to signify the word of God, which works gradually and silently in the heart, as leaven works in meal.

But a learned writer* has lately suggested, that as leaven is used in

* Rev. Alfred Jenour.

other places to represent *wickedness*, it may represent it here also. St. Paul says, in his epistle to the Corinthians, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump." (1 Cor. v. 7.) And Christ once said to his disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees;" by which he meant their false *doctrine*. (Matt. xvi. 12.) If leaven represents wickedness in this parable, then we learn from it how artfully Satan corrupts the pure religion of Christ; just as he sows tares among the wheat, so he mixes falsehood with truth.

By relating parables, our Lord fulfilled the prophecy of the seventy-eighth Psalm: "I will open my mouth in a *parable*; I will utter dark sayings of old." If we refer to that psalm, we shall find that it contains a history of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and of their passing through the wilderness. Was this history a parable? Yes, it was a parable, or dark saying, for all that happened to Israel had a hidden meaning. The apostle Paul, speaking of the afflictions of Israel, declares—"All these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. x. 11.) There is one event especially that took place in the wilderness, which is full of the richest instruction. That event is the lifting up of the brazen serpent. Few, perhaps, understood at the time what it signified. But we see in that serpent the image of Jesus in the likeness of sinful flesh, crucified for our iniquities.

The Bible is full of dark sayings like this. Men naturally love mysteries and wonders. Why do they not love the Bible? Why does it lie neglected, while many foolish and hurtful books are eagerly devoured? Because men love sin, and the Bible speaks against it. Therefore St. Paul exhorts us to lay aside all malice, and guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings, that as new-born babes we may desire the sincere milk of the word. We cannot relish the Bible while we delight in sin.

Evening Scripture portion.

Ps. LXXVIII. 1-33. *God's dealings with Israel.*

MATT. XIII. 44-46.—*The parables of the hidden treasure and of the pearls.*

WE should be much astonished if a man were to show such eagerness to possess a common field, that he was willing to give *any* price for it. But if we afterwards found that he had discovered in it a mine of precious ore, we should not be surprised at his anxiety to obtain the field, even at a very high price.

Now it is in like manner that the world wonders at the eagerness of the believer to secure heavenly blessings. They see no such attraction in religion as to account for his earnestness, and they are ready to consider him a fool and a madman. But they have not discovered the *treasure* which he has discovered. Not that he *hides* it from them, (as the man in the parable did,) but he cannot persuade them to believe his testimony. In vain he assures them that true joy is to be found in Christ alone; they reply that religion is full of gloom and restraint, and that it is only fit for the sick, or the sorrowful. The believer knows well that the favor of God is of infinite value; he buys the field, he secures the treasure, and rejoices in his possession. Now is the time when the field may be bought. That time will soon be past. Awful and endless will be the regrets of those who neglected the opportunity of laying hold on eternal life.

In the next parable, a man is represented *seeking* goodly pearls. By nature we all seek for happiness; but we can never find it, except in the knowledge of Christ; nor can we find it there, unless we are willing to renounce all sinful pleasures for his sake. Augustine, the African bishop, (who lived four hundred years after Christ,) endured many sharp struggles before he would consent to part with his sins. But at length the grace of God subdued his stubborn heart. He cast himself down before the Lord under a fig-tree, and prayed, saying, "How long, Lord, wilt thou be angry? Forever? Remember not my old iniquities. How long shall I say 'To-morrow?' Why should not *this hour* put an end to my slavery?" God, by whose Spirit this prayer was suggested, answered it and revealed Christ to Augustine's soul. Then this man, once so miserable, could say, "How sweet was it in a moment to be free from those delightful vanities, to love which *had been* my dread—to part with which—was *now* my joy! Thou didst cast them out, O my true and highest delight;—and then, O sweeter than all pleasure, enteredst in their room. How was my mind set free from the gnawing cares of sinful passions, and I conversed intimately with Thee, my Light, my Riches, my Saviour, and my God." Surely this penitent sinner had now found the Pearl of great price. Can we say that Jesus is precious to our hearts? Upon a dying bed we should feel that none but He could comfort or save us—what should we do, if we had not found him then?

Evening Scripture portion. Job XXVIII. *The preciousness of wisdom.*

MATT. XIII. 47 to 52.—*The parable of the fishing-net.*

THE parable of the net cast into the sea was calculated particularly to interest the disciples, many of whom were fishermen. They were

accustomed, after the toils of the day, to sort the fishes they had taken. This employment affords a lively image of the distinctions that will be made at the last day. The net represents the word of the Gospel, which is preached to *many*, and which *many* profess to believe. The disciples were shortly to begin the work of preaching it. Great success would accompany their endeavors; but yet that success would be attended by much disappointment. Many to whom they preached would prove hypocrites. *Some* of these would be detected in their lifetime, but *others* not till the judgment-day.

Unbelievers have urged, as an objection against the Christian religion, that hypocrites are found among professed believers! But this is rather a *proof* of its truth, than an objection. If no hypocrites existed, how could we account for our Saviour's declaring that they would arise in the church?

A striking instance was afforded of the truth of our Lord's words in the history of seven missionaries who labored many years ago in Tahiti. Would you not have concluded that men who had sacrificed country and friends in order to instruct savages, must have been true Christians? But out of these seven *two* proved reprobates. The force of temptation brought their real character to light. Had they remained in their own country, it is possible that no temptation might have arisen strong enough to entice them into open sin; but surrounded by savages, they became immoral in their lives, and, it is to be feared, continued impenitent till death. What a lesson does this fact afford! Should it not lead us to examine ourselves, and to call upon God to search us and try us, lest we should deceive ourselves by a mere *form* of godliness? Such a deception can last but a short time. The great sorting day approaches; then angels will divide the good from the bad, the true believer from the empty professor.

When our Saviour had concluded his parables, he asked his disciples whether they understood them; for he had not interpreted them ALL. They replied, Yes, Lord. Then he reminded them of the *use* they should make of the things they had learned; they should store them up in their minds, that they might have them ready upon every occasion; even as a master of a family provides all things necessary for different circumstances, and produces them when wanted. The teachers among the Jews were called Scribes. The disciples were to become teachers, and would need a great store of truths for the instruction of others. Some of these truths might be called "*new*" truths, because not known to them before, and some might be called "*old*" truths, because already familiar to their minds.

We ought to be storing up in our minds the things we have heard, gaining fresh knowledge of the Scriptures and deeper insight into their meaning. We cannot tell how soon we may need them for our own support in trial, or how useful we may find them in enlightening the ignorant, in strengthening the tempted, and in comforting the afflicted. It is very distressing when we see those we love sinking under trouble,

to feel that we are not able to give them solid comfort. An affectionate child has sometimes beheld a parent groaning under a burden of wo, and has felt, "I know there are consolations that might assuage her grief, but I cannot impart them ; for I have neglected the word of God." Then let us for the sake of *others*, as well as for ourselves, store our minds with the holy truths of God, that we may produce them when most needed.

Evening Scripture portion.

Acts XX. 17 to end. *The apostle Paul's parting discourse to the elders at Miletus.*

MARK IV. 33 to end.—*Christ sleeps in the storm and awakes to still it.*

IT was in this manner that the Lord Jesus ended a day of great labor. His friends in the midst of it had desired him to desist, but seeing multitudes assembled to hear the word, he continued to teach. In order to be seen and heard more conveniently, he removed into a ship. The parable of the sower, and many others, were spoken by Jesus while he sat in a ship on the lake of Gennesareth. (See Mark iv. 1.) Afterwards, he had a private conversation in the house with his disciples, when he explained his parables. In the evening he crossed the lake in a ship.

Doubtless he knew of the approaching storm, though it appears that there were no signs of it observed by others, for *many* little ships accompanied him on his voyage. But he was not deterred by his knowledge of the coming storm from setting out, for he intended by it to teach his disciples an important lesson.

They knew little of their Master's *power*, and still less of his *love*. The storm ought not to have alarmed them, because they were with *Him*. God *intended* to alarm Jonah by the storm that arose on the way to Tarsus, for the prophet was fleeing from his presence. We must not suppose, because difficulties and troubles arise, that we are doing wrong. Before we take any important step in life, we should examine the word of God with prayer, and ask pious persons to help us to discover from the Scriptures, whether it is a *right* step ; and if we feel assured that it *is*, no difficulties in the way ought to alarm us. Christians have observed that they have met with most hinderances in setting about those works which in the end have been most richly blessed. A vessel laden with missionaries has been captured by the enemy. Was that calamity a sign that God disapproved the holy purpose of his servants ? Assuredly not. Those who are walking in the commandments of the Lord, may walk without fear, and say in the midst of troubles, "None of these things move me."

Our Saviour was displeased with the disciples' behavior in this storm.

He was displeased by their want of *faith*. They doubted his love, and said, "Carest thou not that we perish?" Because He slept, they thought he was indifferent to their distress. These are the thoughts that too often arise in our minds. Conscious that we are apt to forget the Lord, we fear that He has forgotten us; for we naturally attribute to others the feelings that we ourselves experience. Now his delivering mercies are intended to remove these unbelieving thoughts, and to convince us of his exceeding power and love. For this purpose, he brings his children into straits, and to the very edge of destruction, that he may appear to their rescue in the last moment, and thus force them to believe in his fatherly tenderness.

This is the meaning of the apostle in Rom. v. 3-5: He says that he glories in tribulations. *Why?* Because they work patience, and patience, experience. Experience of *what?* Of God's power and love. And experience worketh hope. God's deliverances are intended to strengthen our hopes of his mercy, and to convince us that he *never* will forsake us. And shall this hope be disappointed? No; *this* hope maketh not ashamed; it shall never prove vain.

The stilling of the storm on the lake of Gennesaret is calculated to lead our thoughts to another scene, and to remind us of that storm of God's wrath against our sins which Jesus stilled, not by his *word*, but by the *sacrifice* of himself. If we are enabled to trust in him, as our Saviour from *hell*, we need not fear any storm that can arise. Let us never say, or even think, "Carest thou not that we perish?" It is a sin to entertain such a thought of *Him* who endured the cross that we might not perish forever and ever. He cares for us more than we care for ourselves; he numbers the hairs of our heads, and watches over us with unceasing, unwearied love.

Evening Scripture portion. Romans V. *God's love to man.*

MARK V. 1-20.—*Christ delivers the demoniac who dwelt among the tombs.*

THE history of the poor demoniac affords a striking instance of the malice of devils, of the power of Christ, and of the wickedness of man.

How great was the malice of the devils that assaulted this poor man! They led him to dwell in solitary places among the tombs; for in those days tombs were generally made in lonely spots, among barren hills and rocks. Cut off from the company of his fellows, he spent his miserable days in crying, and cutting his own flesh; and when his friends mercifully bound his hands in chains, and his feet in

fetters, he burst through these restraints and again escaped to his desolate abode. Thus he became a terror to the neighborhood, and a torment to himself.

This is the state to which devils would reduce *all* men, if they were permitted to vent their malice. They do reduce numbers to a *spiritual* state which resembles that of the demoniac, tempting them to flee from God and his saints, to dwell among the wicked, and urging them to resist all attempts to do them good, and make them happy.

Nor is the malice of devils confined to *men*. They love to torment even the brutes. These devils earnestly desired to enter into the swine, and then hurried them over the precipice, and plunged them in a watery grave. By this act they showed what they *would* have done to the *man*, had they not been restrained; they would fain have hurled him into the pit of eternal destruction. There is not one single soul that could escape perdition, if it were not for the *power of Christ*. Even the devils were obliged to acknowledge his power. They believed and trembled. They could do nothing without his permission. They saw in him their future judge, who would at last condemn them to imprisonment in the lake of fire. In the mean while they had great wrath, knowing that they had but a *short* time in which to vent their malice, (as we read in Rev. xii. 12.) That *short* time is shorter now, and Satan continues to be diligent in using this short space in making efforts to enlarge his kingdom.

We see in the conduct of the owners of the swine an instance of the wickedness of man. Untouched by the sight of him, who, lately a spectacle of terror, was now become gentle and peaceful, they only thought of the loss of their property.

Does not the same disposition prevail now? People will often show zeal for religion, as long as it does not interfere with their gains; but as soon as they are in danger of suffering the slightest loss, through the spread of the gospel, they complain, and would sooner let souls perish than become poorer.

Jesus was not *astonished* at this awful instance of human depravity; for he knew what was in man. So great was his compassion for these wicked men, that he bade the poor creature he had delivered, endeavor to reclaim his unfeeling countrymen. With the same compassion ought we to view every proof of man's fallen nature. Have we not ourselves in times that are *past* desired Jesus to depart from us, fearing lest he should interfere with our worldly schemes? How patiently has he borne our insults! If now we feel the value of our souls, we are dismayed at the remembrance of those days when we preferred a prosperous earthly lot to heavenly knowledge. And if we now love the merciful Saviour, we cannot bear to think of the time when we cared not for his presence,—for *that* presence which we now esteem our supreme happiness.

Evening Scripture portion. Acts XIX. 21 to end. *Demetrius the silversmith.*

MATT. IX. 9-13.—*The calling of Matthew and the publican's feast.*

WE have great reason to be interested in the calling of Matthew, for it was he who wrote the history of our Lord which we are now reading. It is supposed that his calling took place some time before the events we have lately considered; but we have deferred noticing it, because the feast to publicans and sinners was given at *this* period of the history; and it seemed most convenient to consider the calling and the feast at the same time.

The other name of Matthew was Levi, and *that* name is used by two of the evangelists. He was a publican, or tax-gatherer. Persons of this class were detested by the Jews; because, as the taxes were paid to the Romans, by whom the Jews had been conquered, none but the worst kind of people would undertake the odious office of collecting them; and these people rendered themselves still more hateful by their dishonest practices. To this despised order of men, Matthew belonged at the time Jesus called him. He was found sitting by the sea-shore, receiving the duties upon the goods that were landed or embarked. Jesus saw him at the table, which was covered with moneys, and inclined his heart to obey his call, to leave all and follow him.

And why did he choose a *publican* to be one of his apostles? Did he not, by exalting those whom the world despised, intend to stain the pride of all human glory?

Matthew made a feast to his old companions in office, (and who were probably his companions in *iniquity* also,) that they might partake in the high privilege of hearing the Lord converse. Nor did that gracious Lord turn away from these guests, polluted as they were by long habits of unrighteousness. The proud and envious Pharisees scoffed at him for keeping such company. But he answered their taunts by a divine lesson and reproof. He taught them in a short parable his *object* in associating with men; it was *not* to please *himself*, but to save *them*.

How does he save them? By healing their spiritual diseases; therefore he is called the Physician of souls. Would we obtain his notice, we must come and spread our *sins* before him. A good physician will not waste his time in visiting the healthy, however honorable, but flies to the relief of the poorest creature that is dangerously ill. Neither will the Lord grant his presence to the self-righteous, however high in man's esteem; but he will come and bless the humble and contrite soul, however deeply stained by crime, and degraded in the eyes of his fellow-creatures.

Do we understand what *that* meaneth? "I desired mercy and not sacrifice," (vi. 6.) It is a verse in the prophet Hosea. The Pharisees knew the words well, but they understood not their meaning. Their *behavior* showed they understood it not. They blamed Jesus

for showing *mercy* to perishing sinners ; and instead of showing any themselves, they only gave God *sacrifice*, or outward service. And why did they act thus ? Because they *thought* they were righteous. If they had *really* been righteous, they would have felt compassion for sinners. The *angels*, those spotless beings, take a deep interest in our fallen race, and rejoice over each sinner who repents. Though they have never felt the working of evil in their own hearts, yet they do not turn away from us with contempt and disgust. But *men* never feel compassion for their fellow-sinners, till they discover the wickedness of their own hearts. When David was deeply humbled by his transgressions, he felt anxious to save perishing souls. This was his prayer, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy way, and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

The missionary Vanderkemp gave a beautiful example of the same spirit. Not only did he go out as a missionary to the heathen, but he desired to make the voyage to Africa in a convict-ship. His wish was granted. He went with a depraved troop ; but many of their hearts were melted during their voyage : some who had secretly filed off their chains, confessed what they had done, and quietly submitted to have them again riveted upon their hands and feet. Thirty-five died of putrid fever on the passage. Vanderkemp attended them in their last hours, and saw not a few, before they departed, full of joy and peace through believing in a crucified Saviour.

Evening Scripture portion. Micah VI. *Mercy better than sacrifice.*

LUKE V. 33 to end.—*Christ explains by parables why his disciples did not fast.*

THIS is a difficult passage, and it has been explained in different ways ; so that we can scarcely forbear wishing that our Saviour himself had given an explanation of these parables. Yet surely he would not have left them unexplained, if it were not possible by attentive consideration to unravel their meaning.

It was the disciples of that imprisoned saint, John the Baptist, who inquired why the disciples of Jesus never fasted. The Pharisees fasted often. As one of them boasted in his prayer, "I fast twice a week." These fastings were part of that righteousness by which they excited the admiration of the people, and by which they hoped to purchase heaven. John the Baptist had not taught his disciples to fast with such views. It was in grief for their sins that they fasted ; and it was with the same holy feelings John himself fasted. Jesus, however, did not fast *openly* : how much he may have fasted in *secret* we

know not ; but he was seen to eat and drink in the usual manner, and on that account was called a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber. We know this accusation was false, and that the holy Jesus set an example of temperance, as well as of every other virtue. Once, when very weary, he refused to eat, saying, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." And at other seasons he "had no leisure so much as to eat," (Mark vi. 31.)

The Lord related several little parables to explain his *reasons* for not teaching his disciples to fast. In the first parable he compared himself to a bridegroom. This was a title that John himself had given him, saying, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom." The Church was the bride : Christ was the bridegroom. The disciples, the ministers, were compared by Jesus to the children of the bridechamber, or to the friends of the bridegroom, who could not mourn at the wedding. The disciples were too full of joy to fast when they were following their Master from place to place, witnessing his miracles, and listening to his discourses. But the days would come when they would no longer enjoy the presence of the bridegroom, and when they would be called to endure heavy trials, to suffer hunger and thirst, and to be in fastings often.

Jesus prepared his disciples, just before he left them, for the afflictions that awaited them. He said, "The time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service," (John xvi. 2-4.) And he added, "These things I said *not* unto you at the *beginning*, because I was with you." In the same manner he often now protects a *new* convert from heavy trials. It is very common to find the *entrance* upon a religious course fraught only with delight : the new convert is sometimes inclined to think that he shall weep no more, but pass his days in a course of uninterrupted usefulness and joy. But trial comes at last.

The homely employment of mending garments was the subject of one of the Lord's parables. Every one who has ever repaired woollen garments, knows that it would be unwise to mend them with stiff unprepared cloth. Another parable was taken from the eastern custom of putting wine into bottles of *skins*. These skins, when they were old, were unfit for *new* wine, because they were then too weak to bear its fermentation. These two parables seem to have a similar meaning. Did they not allude to the present weakness of the disciples ? They were new converts, and not able yet to suffer great trials. For though garments and skin-bottles are strong at *first* and weak *afterwards*, it is just the contrary with believers ; they are weak at first and strong afterwards. Peter was so weak at first, that he was induced by a few scornful speeches to deny his Master ; but he was so strong afterwards, that he was able to bear crucifixion for his sake.

The Lord concluded his discourse with another parable : "No man also having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new : for he saith, The old is better." The gospel is like the best wine. Jesus gave

MATT. IX. 27-34.—*Christ gives sight to two blind men, and speech to a dumb man.*

It appears that the Lord Jesus put the faith of the two blind men to a short trial; for he did not cure them as soon as they asked him; he waited till he was come into the house before he granted their petition. But how well they were rewarded for waiting, by their conversation with their Lord in the retirement of the house! The blind men spoke but little: "Yea, Lord." Those were their words; but these simple words pleased Jesus, for they were sincere words. What could we reply, if the Lord were to ask us whether we believed that he was able to do every thing? Could we reply, "Yea, Lord." Let us in times of trouble remember that Jesus can do every thing.

After the Lord had left the house, he cured a dumb man. This miracle he performed publicly, in the presence of his enemies. The poor man was an object of great compassion, for *he* could not (like the blind man) plead for himself: others brought him to Jesus. Should not this teach us that we should pray for those who, through the power of Satan, are dumb unto God, and cannot pray for themselves? This cure excited much astonishment, and caused men to exclaim, "It was never so seen in Israel." There had been other prophets, such as Elijah and Elisha, who had done miracles, but not such great, or numerous miracles as Christ performed.

Jesus now performs wonders on men's souls, which cause many to exclaim, "It was never so seen before." The gospel produces effects, which nothing *but* the gospel can produce. What has it not wrought in the South Sea Islands! It has changed thousands of blind idolaters and murderers into sons of truth and peace. In England, the preaching of the gospel has oftentimes transformed the most abandoned characters into holy men. Yet these wonders do not silence the enemies of Christ. The Pharisees were so wicked as to exclaim, "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils." They knew that they spoke falsely, but they hated Jesus so much, that they used *any* means to hinder the people from believing on him. There are still persons to be found who will slander the servants of God even when they know them to be innocent. There lived in the last century a pious curate named Maddock, who converted many souls by the preaching of the gospel. Those who hated his doctrine invented slanders concerning him, and so shook his spirits, as to cause him to fall ill and to resign his curacy. But some time afterwards two of his bitter enemies relented, and acknowledged that the reason of their wicked conduct was, that they could not endure the doctrine he had preached to them; and that they had never believed the reports they had spread. And what were the feelings of this holy man upon the occasion? He wrote in his journal, "Now my enemies have confessed their enmity against God, and his word, and against me for preaching it. O Lord, by this